CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

SKELLY

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Rev A. M. Shelley, D.D.
17th May 1928

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CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE FOR SISTERHOODS

IN TWO VOLUMES

BY

THE REV. A. M. SKELLY, O.P.

VOLUME I

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FOREWORD

When I first made known to a clerical friend my purpose of publishing these Conferences on the Religious and the Interior Life, he abruptly called me down, saying: "You are not a *holy* man, nor have you practical experience of those things of which you treat; why then do you not leave the writing of such books to those who are experienced and holy?" Though I felt that the reproof was only too true, yet I conceived in my heart the thought that if only *holy and experienced* men were privileged to write on such subjects, the science of experimental theology would be much the poorer to-day. I persevered in my purpose, therefore, and the favor that has been accorded to former works of the series is proof that there was a place and a want with the public for such teaching. And why should it not be so? The *mystic, taught of God,* is like the aloe plant: he blooms only once in a century. On the other hand, the vocation to the higher life is given to us all.

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The great Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians addresses them as men and women *"called to be saints."* We hope to show in the following pages that all Christ's followers, all those living in the state of grace, are, by that fact alone, called to the highest perfection, and the full blossoming of sainthood is, in God's intention, the destined outcome, the matured fruit of the beginner in the spiritual life: just as the ripe ear is but the natural term of the growing blade. Every soul living in that state receives from God a supply of grace *sufficient* to lead her ultimately to the term of perfect sanctity. It depends on herself to make that grace *efficacious* by her personal fidelity.

There is no select class, then, to whom those teachings especially appeal. The Apostle spoke to all when he said: "Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Jesus Christ." They are needful to all and, like the Holy Scriptures themselves, "they are profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect: furnished to every good work." Those who neglect to aspire to sainthood and to strive for it, will have so far failed in their vocation, and will be deprived of merit

which in God's intention should be theirs for all eternity.

I make bold, then, to present these further volumes to the public, relying on the interest they *ought* to take in reading them. Another ground on which I confide for favor is the fact that little of the doctrine found in them is mine. They are in good part an adaptation and an abridgement of the works of two noted Dominican authors: *Théologie Ascétique et Mystique,* etc., by the Reverend André-Marie Meynard, a writer of the past generation; and *Mystica Theologia,* etc., by the Reverend Thomas A. Vallgornera, one of the bright lights of the seventeenth century. On the texture woven by these two great theological writers have been embroidered teachings culled directly from the mystic doctors themselves, from the writings of St. Thomas, of St. Catherine of Siena, of Saints Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross, of Blessed Louis of Granada, of St. Alphonsus Liguori, of St. Francis de Sales, of Blessed Henry Suso, etc.,—all approved teachers of the Church.

As to the form, my aim has been to interpret the teachings of the saints, as far as the sublime doctrine of which they treat will allow, in the

clearest and simplest language. Mindful of the fact that many of my readers will not be formal theologians, but only the little ones of Christ, I have tried to copy the model drawn by the Master himself, who prayed: "I give thee thanks, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father; for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight." (Matt. XI, 25–6.)

A. M. S.

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CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

VOLUME ONE

FIRST BOOK

Introduction to the Spiritual Life

FIRST CONFERENCE

The Christian Life

I

1. In reading the works of ascetic writers we find they make use of the term *life* in a variety of senses. They speak, namely, of the natural life, the Christian life, the interior life, the religious life. It is good that we have from the beginning a well-defined notion of these terms.

The natural life is that which originates in our rational nature and is lived by means of our natural powers,—mind, will and senses;

and it has regard solely to the order established by God in creation.

Of the religious life we have already treated (see *Conferences on the Religious Life, passim*). To the consideration of the interior life we devote the following two volumes.

In this our opening conference let us treat briefly of the Christian life. It will serve as the ground-work of this treatise, and as a general introduction to the conferences that follow.

2. What is the Christian life? It is a life inspired by the teaching, precepts, and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the direction of the Church and her doctors. It is led practically by the faithful accomplishment of the will of God and the exercise of the virtues of which our Lord gave the example to the world.

In order that this life may tend towards the perfection that is proper to it, it ought not to be limited to views of self-interest, to a liking for a morality of a superior type, or even to the very noble desire of rendering to God the worship that is due to Him according to the form prescribed. It must lay out for itself an end more elevated still, that of contracting an intimate friendship with God Himself, following the desires of Christ: "I will not now

call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth; but I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father I have made known to you." (Jn. xv, 15.)

Furthermore, the Saviour not only initiated His disciples into the secrets of His Father; He likewise communicated to them His nature, so that being made the adopted children of God they may have a right to the eternal inheritance. The Christian life is, then, a *life entirely supernatural* and truly divine in its origin, its means of action, and its supreme destiny.

3. It is preëminently the work of the infinite love of God in regard to men. "God who is rich in mercy," says St. Paul, "for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ . . . that he might show in the ages to come the abundant riches of His grace, in his bounty towards us in Christ Jesus, . . . for we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God had prepared beforehand that we should practise." (Eph. ii, 4–10.)

God, in fact, loved us from all eternity.

His love is His first gift, and that same love is accordingly the principle of all His other gifts.

But what can be this love He bears us and which is His first gift? It is the Holy Ghost who alone among the Divine Persons proceeds by way of the will and of love as the blessed term of the infinite love by which the Father and the Son love each other and us together with them. There can be in God, in fact, only this sole immense love that extends itself to all lovable objects in God and out of God; whence we must conclude that, as the Father and the Son love each other mutually by the Holy Ghost, the term of their love, they love us also by the same Holy Ghost.

It is true that the Holy Ghost would not cease to be produced if this personal love of the Father and the Son did not extend to us. Nevertheless, supposing that God wished to love us, He must necessarily love us by this same love. The Holy Ghost is, then, the love by which the Father and the Son love us together with themselves, and wish to do us good, and do so effectively.

On this title one can say that the Holy Ghost is in an ineffable manner the first gift

that God gives us: *"Donum Dei altissimi," "Gift of the Most High God."* This name is proper and personal to Him, as is also that of Love. It belongs to Him in virtue of His procession from the Father and the Son. Yes, before we were in the world, the Holy Ghost was our infinitely precious gift, which God had prepared from all eternity to confer on us in time!

That a thing have the title of gift it is not necessary that it be really given; it suffices that the donor can dispose of it in favor of a certain one in a given time and place. It was thus with the Holy Ghost. Love outran the gift, and this love is properly speaking a gift ineffable; thought of faith capable of exciting our admiration, our love and gratitude.

Let us here make an important observation that one would do well not to forget. All the interior operations of the Holy Trinity are common to the three Divine Persons. Many, nevertheless, are attributed more particularly *by appropriation* to the Holy Ghost, to make us comprehend that they come from the immense love of God towards us.

The Holy Ghost, as we have said, proceeds by way of the will and of love. It is this fact

that explains why we attribute to Him especially the effects of the infinite love of God for us. It is again on account of this that the Holy Ghost is called gift, a word that is applied to what is given freely, gratuitously, and without any hope of reward.

4. Let us enter now into some developments which will show us by what an admirable way divine love covers us with benefits. The Holy Ghost as gift, after what we have said, can be considered in two manners: First, in as much as He prepares for us other divine gifts. Secondly, in time, when He is conferred on us actually. And, first, the Holy Ghost, eternal love of the Father and the Son, finds in creation a first means of satisfying the inclination that carries Him to communicate Himself abroad. But the natural gifts, all excellent as they may be, are far from exhausting the infinite source of divine bounty. This is why beyond the determining motive of the Incarnation, which is, according to the school of St. Thomas, to repair the evil of the first fall, we can say that the Holy Ghost demands of the Father to give His Son to the world, so that by this Divine Gift He may have a means of contenting His infinite want of loving and giving Himself.

It is then to the Holy Ghost that we are indebted for the Incarnation of the Word. For, although the Holy Ghost cannot send the Son from whom He proceeds, we can say that He is, in as much as He is that uncreated Love, the primordial cause of the divine act that has given us a Saviour, and that He is by consequence the cause of the effects of mercy that have followed the divine mission of the Son. We owe equally to the Holy Ghost all the meritorious acts of our Lord Jesus Christ, since it is again this Spirit of love that has carried the Divine Master to suffer and die for our salvation.

Lastly, it is the Holy Ghost that preserves always the Heart of Jesus open to mercy and makes us find in this adorable Saviour an advocate who intercedes unceasingly for us.

II

1. From the summits of the supernatural considered in its primordial cause, let us descend to the marvels of the supernatural in the human soul, regenerated and sanctified. What do we see in this Jerusalem—earthly and heavenly at the same time? We see the Holy Ghost and His gifts.

A short prefatory explanation will not be without utility.

God alone is for Himself His principle and end. Infinite Being, He finds His complete and last perfection in His own essence. Man has God for principle and end. His complete and last perfection consists in his union with the Principle that gave him being. In the natural order we find already with man an end proportioned to his nature, and means corresponding to his nature and end. The end of man in the natural point of view consists in the perfection of his soul; that is to say, in the union of his soul with God by natural knowledge and love. To arrive at this end, man has suitable faculties which correspond to the three lives, vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual, that he lives.

In the supernatural order *absolute,* such as we understand it here, his end can be only God Himself. Hence, the perfection of his soul raised to the supernatural order will consist in the supernatural knowledge and love of God; that is to say, in the vision of the Divine Essence, and in the love that corresponds to it; in the immediate possession of God. To arrive at this end the nature and the powers of man

must participate in the supernatural and divine order, without which there would not be proportion between the end and the means.

2. A rapid exposition of the divine gifts will show us at present how man arrives at his supernatural end by the Holy Ghost and His gifts.

First, it is sanctifying grace, quality of the divine order inherent in the substance of our soul, of which it is the supernatural *form* or determining element. By sanctifying grace we put on a new and divine being, and become children of God and co-heirs of Jesus Christ.

With sanctifying grace, which adheres to the substance of the soul, we receive all the infused habits, theological and moral, with the gifts, properly so called, of the Holy Ghost,—virtues and gifts by which are operated all our supernatural acts. If those supernatural acts are produced by eminent virtues and, furthermore, under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, they are called "fruits"; when they are truly perfect and heroic, and when, although they may be painful to nature, they are accompanied with a certain spiritual delectation, they are designated under the name of *"beatitudes."*

Together with sanctifying grace and the infused habits, the Holy Ghost, or, rather, the three Divine Persons, dwell in us and unite themselves to us,—signal favor which crowns the dignity of the Christian!

3. But for the supernatural habits there must be a motor. Here again is a manifestation of love. After having created in our soul the supernatural being and the infused supernatural habits which perfect our powers, the Holy Ghost impresses motion to all those riches of sanctifying grace and charity. Actual grace (which God meanwhile can accord to those who have not sanctifying grace) puts in exercise the virtues and the gifts; for there is no life without action.

The Divine Motor finishes then His work even to this, that after having conducted us from light to light and from virtue to virtue, He renders us participators of the supernatural life finished and consummated by the Light of Glory. Then we arrive at vision and the eternal possession of the Divine Essence.

Such are, in brief, the marvels of divine love, that is to say, of the Holy Ghost, in souls. Such is, as far as we can say, especially in a simple declaration, the exposition of the

supernatural order. Jesus Christ, the Man-God, is the foundation of it. This is why the supernatural or Christian life is *"a life renewed in Jesus Christ."* The Holy Ghost is the Sovereign Motor and principal agent of it. It is for this reason that we call this life, *"a life fashioned by the Holy Ghost."* This rapid glance thrown on the supernatural order shows us how God is the principle, the means, and the end, of the Christian life.

SECOND CONFERENCE

Jesus Christ, the Foundation of the Christian Life

1. In my former conference I defined the Christian life to be "the supernatural and divine life of a soul renewed in Jesus Christ and fashioned by the Holy Ghost." The first member of the definition I have already expounded for you.

Let me in this conference devote myself to the exposition of the second member; it is "a life renewed in Jesus Christ." Why renewed in Jesus Christ? Because it had been destroyed in Adam and could be restored only through the sufferings and merits of a God-Saviour. Jesus Christ is this Restorer of the supernatural life in us. He is so because He reconciled sinful humanity with His Father. There is now no other foundation for the supernatural and divine life in us, because there is no other means of bridging the gulf which separated guilty man from God. To attain this end there was

need of a Man-God. Jesus Christ is come in order that we might be able to enter on the possession of the true life of our souls, which is God.

The first man was created in a state of justice and holiness. His body obeyed his inferior powers. His inferior powers bowed with respect before His reason. His reason was submissive to God. The subordination was complete. Together with sanctifying grace Adam possessed a marvelous assemblage of gifts and virtues. "He was created upright," says Scripture. His nature was perfect. He possessed all knowledge. His will had dominative power over all his inferior faculties. His senses, his passions, were the willing servants of His mind and will. He was gifted with immortality. But this blessed state did not outlast the *trial*. We know, alas, by our experience the deplorable results of that trial.

Now, what we had lost through the sin of our first father, we have recovered in Jesus Christ. The grace of justification through Jesus Christ does not, it is true, make us reenter on all the prerogatives of the state of original innocence. Meantime, beyond the remission of our sins we find by this grace in

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Jesus Christ, our Lord, a principle of the supernatural life of a superior efficacy, one, moreover, suited to our actual weakness. Jesus Christ, the Man-God, teaches us the supernatural life by His doctrine. He enforces it by His example. He merits it for us by His Blood. He imparts it to us by sanctifying grace, which He possesses in its fullness. He is then our Master, our Model, our Redeemer, and our Head.

2. We need not delay here to show how our Lord is for us the principle of the supernatural life by His example and doctrine. It will suffice to follow the traces of His merits and show forth in Him the foundation and the source of the supernatural life.

The Holy Ghost, as we have seen, is the principle and cause of our justification. In eternity He is that Love who solicits the Father to send His Son for the salvation of men; in time He applies to us the fruits of the Redemption. Jesus Christ, in as much as He is God, confers grace on us also, and that with *sovereign authority,* but as man, an instrument penetrated with the Divinity by the Hypostatic Union, He remains and dwells the *source* a thousand times blessed of infinite merits and

of a supernatural divine order. We shall return later on to show the mode of action of Jesus Christ in souls. Here let us content ourselves with throwing a glance over the supernatural order in its living, universal and inexhaustible source.

3. We can consider three unities in our Lord. As God, there is a *unity of nature* between the Word and the two other Divine Persons. As the Word Incarnate, there is an absolute *unity of Person* between the divine nature and the human nature by the grace of the Hypostatic Union. As Head of the Church there is a *mystic union* between our Lord and His living members, in this sense, that many persons make but *one sole mystic body* under *one sole Head,* who unites them and with whom, as integrating parts, they concur to form *mystically* only one sole Person and one sole Christ. This mystic unity is not the unity of nature, nor the unity absolute and properly speaking of person; yet there is between these three unities a certain resemblance. Just as the unity of Person in the Word Incarnate finds its exemplar in the unity of the Divine Essence, so the mystic unity of the members with their Head has its prototype as well as its efficient

cause in the Hypostatic Union of the Word with human nature.

4. But in what consists this connection and resemblance, and how we are to understand this mystic unity? This is an important question.

First of all, the same grace that is in our Lord, is also in us. Jesus Christ, the universal principle of all grace, possesses it in its fullness. It is from this living and inexhaustible source that grace is poured into all souls which form part of the mystic body of the Church,—in such sort that we can say that grace, a quality of the divine order, the supernatural form or determining element of our souls, is in its entirety in our Lord. "Grace, the principle of eternal life," says St. Paul, "is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. vi, 23.) "It is of the fullness of this principle that we all have drunk," says St. John (i, 16), for we form mystically only one person with our Lord.

The source of this mystic unity is technically called "the grace of the Head," because, just as the head of the human body exercises its influence, and acts on all the members; so our Lord acts on all those who belong to Him. "For God hath made Him head over all the Church." (Eph. i, 22.)

It is an undoubted truth that all the graces which the Saviour possesses are not solely in Him as in a particular man, but, furthermore, as in the Head of the Church to whom all the faithful are united, in order that flowing from Him they may be poured on them to be a principle of life and of supernatural and divine operations. If the same grace that is in our Lord is also in us, is it not just to say that, *mystically,* there is only one Person, one sole Jesus Christ, in the whole body of the Church, the parts of which are joined and united together with so just a proportion? (Eph. iv, 15.) Is it not just to see in Christian souls so much of Jesus Christ by participation? St. Paul did not fear to say: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me," as if he wished to give us to understand that his life and actions belonged to Jesus Christ, who, in the order of grace, is the mystic Person that animates the body of the Church. Is it not also in this sense that Christ is born, and grows in us, even till, finally, He receives in us His perfection? (Gal. iv, 19.) And can we understand any other thing when we hear the Apostle say that he "fills up in himself what was wanting to the sufferings of Christ?" (Col. i, 24.)

Granted that the life of Christ, the Man-God, considered in the rigor of terms, be not our natural life; yet, by reason of this mystic unity which exists between us and Him by grace, His supernatural and divine life is our life. His merits begin to belong to us, and we enter into communication of His rights to the celestial inheritance. What a mystery! In Jesus, and by Him, we are redeemed from sin! In Him and by Him, we become children of God! In Him and by Him, the whole Trinity dwells in us! In Him and by Him, we become citizens of Heaven! Yes! *Jesus is the living, universal, inexhaustible source of the supernatural and divine order,* because in Him and by Him God has given us His grace, which is a most excellent participation of the divine nature.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Holy Ghost, the Sovereign Motor of the Christian Life

1. We now come to consider the last term of the definition of the Christian life: namely, that *that* life "is fashioned in us by the Holy Ghost." That it is, because the Holy Ghost is its Sovereign Motor.

Jesus Christ is the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Holy Ghost is the heart of it. For, just as the heart originates life and motion to the whole body; so the Holy Ghost imparts motion to the supernatural life of which our Lord is the foundation and the source. Our Lord has redeemed us. It is by the Holy Ghost that we are justified and sanctified. What good would the Redemption be to us if the fruits of salvation which it has merited for us were not applied to us? Now, this application is particularly attributed to the Holy Ghost, to whom belongs, by *appropriation,* justification and the sanctification of souls.

Without doubt, the three Divine Persons operate conjointly in our justification and sanctification. Nevertheless, in Church language founded on Holy Scripture, we attribute power and the creation to the Father, because He is the first Person of the Blessed Trinity, whence the others proceed. Wisdom and all that depends on it are attributed to the Son, because He is the Word, the Wisdom of God. Goodness and all the effects of the love of God are on a just title attributed to the Holy Ghost who is love. In this application of the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, there are two great acts, namely, justification and sanctification.

2. First of all, the Holy Ghost, Sovereign Motor of our souls, prevents us by His grace. He incites; He calls; He inspires; then He operates justification. He infuses in us the life divine, and effaces with our concurrence the stains and the filth of sin. In fact, contrition produced in us by the Holy Ghost withdraws us from evil and turns us towards God, our end. It belongs to the Holy Ghost, who created all things by love, to create us anew in the supernatural order. For it is by Him that God does all things. God by loving His own goodness is the universal cause of all things.

"Lord," says the Wise Man, "thou lovest all things that are, and thou hatest none of thy works." (Wisd. vi, 25.) "Divine love," says St. Denis the Mystic, "has not allowed God to remain unfruitful." It was necessary, then, that the hearts of men destroyed by sin be created anew by the Holy Ghost. "Send forth thy Spirit," says the Psalmist, "and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth." That the Holy Ghost has this virtue, this mission to fulfill, what wonder that all sins are renewed through love? "Charity covereth a multitude of sins."

With the grace of justification we receive not only sanctifying grace and all the infused habits, but the Holy Trinity, whole and entire, dwells in us. The Holy Ghost regenerates us spiritually. We become the adopted children of God, brethren of Jesus Christ, and coheirs of His glory. Eternal life is due to us only in as much as we become children of God.

Now, we become children of God in becoming like to our Lord; but we become like to our Lord in living according to His Spirit, who is the Holy Ghost. "You have not received the spirit of servitude, but you have received the spirit of adoption by which we all cry, 'My

Father, My Father.'" (Rom. viii, 15.) This is an undoubted truth. For the Spirit of God Himself affirms that we are the children of God. "Because you are his children," says St. Paul again, "God has sent into your hearts the Spirit of his Son, who makes you cry: 'My Father, My Father.'" (Gal. iv, 6.) What a supreme and truly divine dignity! What a treasure, that of justification!

3. The divine action of the Holy Ghost does not stop here. After having justified us, He sanctifies us. The motion given by justification tends to develop and to progress unceasingly. The Holy Ghost does not content Himself with offering us His succor in order to enter on the way of justice and sanctity. He enlightens us, He strengthens us, He sanctifies us more and more. He leads us even till we arrive at the term and the port of salvation.

First. The Holy Ghost enlightens our intellect. It is by Him that we know all things that we know. "The Spirit, the Paraclete whom the Father will send you in my name, will teach you all things, and will recall to you all that I have told you." (John xiv, 26.) "His unction will instruct you in all that you ought to know." (John ii, 27.)

Second. The Holy Ghost strengthens us; He aids us and in some sort constrains us to observe the Commandments. For it is the property of love to unite wills, and to carry to the most generous sacrifice. "If anyone love me, he will keep my word." (John xiv, 23.) It is the Holy Ghost who makes us love God; so, too, it is He who aids us to observe His Commandments. "I will give you a new heart," says Ezechiel, "and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take away the stony heart that beats in your breast, and I will give you a true heart of flesh animated with my Spirit. I will make you walk in the way of my precepts, keep and fulfil my laws." (Ez. xxxvi, 26.)

Finally, the Holy Ghost directs us in the generous fulfilment of the divine will in such a way as that all in us corresponds to His divine movements. He becomes our sole Master and Guide.

The sanctification of souls is a law of progress. The Holy Ghost, Divine Motor of the supernatural life, stops in the way of perfection only at the last term, that is, at eternal life, by the grace of final perseverance which conducts to it.

At last, in Heaven, by the Holy Ghost will

be accomplished beatific love, consummation of love divine and plenitude of repose of souls. It is then by the Holy Ghost that we are justified and sanctified.

We had lost in Adam with divine grace all right to the celestial inheritance. We were soiled with all sorts of crimes. The love of God has repaired all. We have re-entered on the possession of grace with a super-abundance which would be astonishing if love were not the principle of it. But how is this mystery operated? In the name of Jesus Christ; by the merits of Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God, and by the Holy Spirit, who makes the application of it to our souls.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Interior Life: Its Phases

I

When treating of the Christian life and of its foundation and motor, I promised to treat afterwards of the interior life. What do we understand of the interior life?

The interior life is none other than the Christian life perfected under the superabundant action of the Holy Ghost. There is between those two lives only a difference of degree. The Christian life is the basis of the interior life. The latter, however, bespeaks something more. It supposes a greater zeal and a greater labor in the formation of Jesus Christ in us. It is the life of a soul which strives to rise in the divine supernatural ways by the intelligence and will. It is a very perfect knowledge, and, above all, a very intimate love of God. In a word, the interior life is a life of union with God, where the lethargy of tepid and languid souls disappears, where divine

grace superabounds in a generous and faithful heart. To arrive at this life, the soul removes obstacles with vigor and uses carefully the helps that are offered her in order to unite herself to God and to accomplish His holy will.

The interior life is then a life of perfection and holiness, of meritorious labor, of glorious contest, whose term is a closer union with God. It has for first effect to give to our spiritual renovation a development no less solid than consoling. It makes us re-ascend in Jesus Christ, with the succor of the Holy Ghost, that is, with the aid of His grace and His gifts, the mysterious ladder of perfection which the disaster of the first Fall had made us descend. To know and love God, to imitate Jesus Christ, to practise His holy law, to conform one's self to the spirit of His counsels, to comply lovingly with the manifestations of the divine will, —such are the principle actions of the interior life. He who employs himself in this way is an ascetic. He is called also a spiritual and an interior man; that is, a man renewed in Jesus Christ and fashioned by the Holy Ghost to an excellent degree; *fashioned,* I say, which indicates on the part of God a more sanctifying action, and on the part of the soul a more gen-

erous and perfect fidelity. The soul, in order to tend to a more elevated end, is not then dispensed from the first duties and the first occupations of the Christian life. It would be to go by a false route to neglect the necessary in order to apply oneself to things that are more or less of supererogation,—fatal illusion into which souls little enlightened or generous often fall.

Let it never be forgotten that the interior life consists essentially in the love of God and neighbor. It is to this center that all must be applied from the first efforts of the soul that enters on the way of perfection to the most sublime acts of the unitive way.

II

1. Two things call for particular attention in the exposition of the interior life: its phases, and its degrees. Let me devote myself in this conference to the exposition of the former. This life, as we see, takes in the whole expansion of the Christian life from its most imperfect beginnings to its most sublime termination. It is a continual progress of which it is difficult to follow and fix the development. Never-

theless, we can determine certain phases of it that are more clearly recognized by the salient traits which characterize them.

The phases have reference especially to the attitude of the soul, and they are distinguished by the degree of her *activity* or *passivity* under the action of grace. In the beginning the soul has to struggle to free herself from the thraldom of the world, from the tyranny of the passions, and from the temptations of the devil. Her action is effected painfully in the effort to exercise herself in the fundamental virtues, to recollect herself in prayer, to give herself up to the action of grace and of the Holy Ghost. This is the *ascetic* life.

To this first phase is opposed an extreme phase where the same activity is in some sort reduced to a minimum consequent on the habit of the supernatural and of the predominance of the influence of the Holy Ghost. This Divine Monitor constitutes Himself the director, guide, and mover of the soul. He charges Himself with the work of restoring to her complete liberty, of achieving her deliverance from the world, the passions, and the devil. By reason of the docility and strength which the soul acquires under the influence of the gifts of

the Holy Ghost, she gives herself with much attraction and success to the practice of virtues whose acts become eminent. The interior illuminations becoming more brilliant and frequent, the soul gives herself to prayer with more relish, experiences in it greater consolation, and enjoys a more intimate and persevering love of God. There is operated in her a change, a supernatural transformation, which gives her a greater affinity with God and permits her a more intimate union with Him. This is the *mystic life*. The Holy Ghost governs and changes the soul much more than she governs and changes herself.

These two *phases* are the most important and the best characterized stages of the spiritual life. They indicate the extreme points of it. They do not succeed each other ordinarily in a brusque and rigorous fashion, in such sort that no manifestations of the mystic life appear in the course of the ascetic life, and that the mystic life excludes all the characteristics of the ascetic life.

As we shall shortly see, there is between these two extreme phases an intermediary phase, sometimes much prolonged, in the course of which is seen the progress of a soul

who, having passed the first stage of the spiritual life, disposes herself to enter the threshold of the mystic life. This is the *transitional phase*.

2. In all ways the principles that direct the motion of the spiritual life in its complete evolution are harmonized with art to maintain the most perfect unity of the spiritual life in the most admirable variety of its manifestations. These principles are the same principles of theology whose power reaches to the whole development of the supernatural in the soul.

Indeed, as we are reminded by a modern author, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, the sacred science proceeding from revelation, contained in Scripture and Tradition, preserved and explained by the magisterium of the Church, orders all the revealed truths and their consequences in a unique body of doctrine, where the precepts and counsels appear founded on the supernatural mystery of the divine life, of which grace is a participation.

Finally, it shows how, by the practice of the virtues and docility to the Holy Ghost, the soul comes not only to believe, but to *taste* the revealed mysteries, to grasp the profound sense of the word of God, the source of all supernatural knowledge, and to live, so to speak, in a con-

tinual union with the Holy Trinity, who dwells in us.

Mystic theology appears thus as the last crowning of the whole acquired theological science, and it is competent to direct souls in the ways of *experimental mysticism*. This latter is a loving and delightful knowledge, entirely supernatural and infused, which the Holy Ghost alone by His action can give us as the prelude of the Beatific Vision.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Degrees of the Interior Life

I

1. After having given thought to the *phases* of the interior life, we go on to the study of its *degrees.*

The distinction of its *degrees,* instead of referring principally to the activity displayed in avoiding sin, practising virtue, and giving oneself to prayer, as we have seen relatively to the *phases,* looks more particularly to the *results obtained,* first, by the more conscious labor of the soul, then by the predominance of the action of grace and the Holy Ghost. This distinction gives place to the classic division of the interior life into the purgative, illuminative, and unitive life or way.

This division, universally received among Doctors, is founded on the nature of the spiritual life. In fact, all life in man has a commencement, a progress, and a term.

St. Thomas explains the three states of the interior life by the example of human life, and compares spiritual growth to the corporal development of man.

"Human life," he remarks, "is divided into many parts, and, notably, into three distinct epochs, determined by the actions and by the tastes to which we arrive in growth. The first period comprises all the term which passes before the age of reason. The second commences with youth. Finally, the third arrives when the body is already formed, and it lasts up to perfect development. It is thus that we distinguish three degrees in the interior life by reason of the results which the soul acquires in the way of perfection. The different ages of human life are characterized by qualities and effects which are proper to them. It is the same with the three degrees of the interior life. Nothing is then better founded than this division of asceticism into three distinct spiritual degrees. To contradict the common teaching of Doctors upon this point would be, says Pope Innocent XI, "full of pride, rash, and pernicious." (XXVI Prop. Damn. ab Innoc. XI., Nov. 20th, 1687.)

2. Meantime, we need not see anything too absolute or too exclusive in this division of the

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interior life. These three states have numerous points of contact: so much so that it is not rare to find certain acts of the illuminative and even of the purgative life in the exercises of the unitive life; and reciprocally. It is the dominant note that characterizes each of these lives. We must recognize that they often encroach on one another, and that it is impossible that it could be otherwise. Those who commence cannot purify themselves from sin, from their vices and unruly passions, without the light of true wisdom and without the succor of divine charity. Those who advance cannot make solid progress without being already somewhat transformed by love. Finally, whatever may be our union with God we have always need of attentively watching over our passions and of applying ourselves to the practice of virtue.

Let us see now in what consists each of those degrees.

II

The Purgative Way

1. The purgative way consists principally in purifying ourselves from our sins and de-

stroying their causes; in extirpating vices and bad habits even in their sources by penance, prayer, and mortification, interior as well as exterior.

Meantime those who commence are not so occupied in resisting their unsubdued passions and in purifying themselves from their sins that they do not labor also to build up the edifice of perfection—after the example of the people of God who, at the same time that they fought against their enemies, the Samaritans, built up the walls of Jerusalem. This is why reading and meditation are exercises proper to the purgative life. In fact, we must know, in order to desire; and we must see, in order to walk; we must set ourselves to work, in order to learn. The servant labors much in order to gain a little. Let us labor also, since we are servants of a good Master, and since a great reward awaits us. Let us ask of God and of men of God,—of God, in prayer—of men of God, direction; and here let me remark once and for all that, under God's ordinary Providence, a director to guide us in the spiritual life is essential. "What must we do," asks Boëthius, "to merit to find the Sovereign Good?" "We must invoke the Father of all things, without

whom we can do nothing; we must then ask men of God to direct us."

To be enlightened and strengthened by prayer and the word of truth, this then is one of the principal characteristics of the purgative life. The practice of virtue is also necessary to those who begin. In fact, as is well observed by St. Thomas, "all the virtues commanded by the divine law have for their end either the purification of the heart from the disorders of the passions, or to keep the conscience right, or to preserve purity of faith." Now if we do not exercise ourselves to do those three things, we are not yet entered on the purgative way, the preliminary of all perfection.

III

The Illuminative Way

The illuminative way consists principally in establishing oneself and advancing in virtue. The soul, purified from its sins and bad inclinations, labors efficaciously in the development of divine charity. It is the way of progress,—a general law, it is true, in the spiritual life, but more particularly proper to the full growth

of youth and of the fecundity of the illuminative life. A great light begins to shine in the soul, and contemplation commences. According to St. John of the Cross, "we call beginners all those who exercise themselves still (exclusively) in meditation." God introduces them into the way of progress when He raises them to contemplation. Meditation is certainly not excluded from the illuminative, or even from the unitive life. Nevertheless, St. John of the Cross, agreeing in this with St. Thomas and Denis the Carthusian, and other great mystic authors, is not deceived when he sees in the illuminative way a commencement of contemplation.

The proper function of those who progress is to see. It is written: "Be still, and see." (Ps. xliv, 9.) Let us, then, renounce as far as time and circumstances permit, the affairs of this world. *Let us be still, in order that we may see.* He who advances in perfection passes from hearing to seeing, and, as the Psalmist says, "as we have heard, so also we have seen."

But the illuminative life is not a purely contemplative state; it is also a phase of progress in regard to the virtues; those carry with them a great light and become the true nourishment

of our souls. Those who advance in the interior life are then called to practise generously the Christian virtues. After the example of the Divine Master, their food is to do in all things the will of the Heavenly Father. Their principal occupation, we cannot too often repeat it, is to advance in virtue.

IV

The Unitive Way

The unitive life has for its principle and end to attach oneself to God and to enjoy Him. However perfect charity may be on earth, it can always be augmented. Thus, truly interior souls apply themselves unceasingly to make progress in virtue; nevertheless, it is true to say that what occupies them most is to be united to God. In this happy state the soul, already purified by the practice of solid virtue and by trials, enters into the most intimate communion with God. Her prayers are sometimes very sublime, and although within the limits of an ordinary and acquired contemplation, one there discovers the taste and the savor of divine

union. As to the virtues, they are much more perfect, and not rarely, truly heroic.

The property of those who are perfect is to *taste* divine things. There is in this taste all divine spiritual nourishment of souls, three admirable things: hunger, the feeding on the divine aliment, and the enjoyment of the Infinite Good. This spiritual hunger is very lively in the state of union; for, it is written: "Those that eat me shall yet hunger, and those that drink me shall yet thirst." (Eccl. xxiv, 29.) Satiety in supernatural things engenders hunger, because the more one tastes them, the more one knows and loves them. Spiritual reflection is also as complete as possible in the divine union. The soul contemplates attentively the Divine Model in order to judge herself. She endeavors to walk in the footsteps of the saints, and applies herself to profit of the immense benefits that flow from the mystery of the Incarnation. Finally, a spiritual delectation of a very high order fills the soul with an ineffable sweetness,—a foretaste of the happiness of Heaven.

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Call to the Mystic Life. (I)

I

1. After having considered the Christian life, its foundation and motor, and the interior life together with its phases and degrees, we go on to study the call to the mystic life. And first, what do we understand by the mystic life? This is important, inasmuch as the word has been taken in different senses by the masters of the spiritual life. We shall afterwards go on to study the nature of the call to it.

By the mystic life, as we understand it here, we do not mean the Christian life as practised in a more or less fervent manner by devout people in the world. Neither do we speak of it as an extraordinary Christian life favored by ecstasies, visions, and prophetic revelations. We consider the mystic life in the sense understood by such spiritual writers as St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, as the normal crown-

ing of the spiritual life in its full expansion by the dominant action of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

This being stated, it is important to distinguish with care the different ways in which God calls men to Christianity. These data will serve as a basis on which to establish our reply.

a) The vocation to the Christian life may come from the *exterior,* as when it is brought about by the ministry of preaching; or it can proceed from an *interior* illumination under the action of grace.

b) The exterior call may be *general* or *particular.* It is general, inasmuch as it is addressed to all men whom God wishes to save, and to whom He accords sufficient means of salvation. It is particular to such or such a pagan who is led to Christianity by the way that God has shown him. These are philosophic distinctions which it is important to lay hold of.

c) The interior call may be only *sufficient.* It is again *remote* and *immediate,* following the nature of the helps God accords men to lead then to truth and salvation.

2. After those different kinds of calls to the Christian life, we can distinguish the different calls to the mystic life. These are: first, an

exterior and *general* call, coming, it may be, from the reading of the Holy Scriptures or the lives of the Saints, good examples of which one may be witness, and so forth; second, an *exterior* and *particular* call under the influence of a wise director, who draws the attention of a determined subject to the beauties of the spiritual life, the goodness of God, and the confidence He merits, etc.; third, an *interior* but *remote* call from grace, the infused virtues, or the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which tends towards their full expansion in contemplation; fourth an *interior* and *immediate* call, which God Himself gives to the soul in order to draw her to Him, giving her at the same time signs easily discernible. This call can be *sufficient* in itself, although often souls do not respond to it faithfully. It may be *efficacious*, as when the soul follows this divine attraction even to the summits of the mystic life. These explanations being given, I want to say that *all souls in the state of grace* are called to the mystic life in a *general, remote*, and *sufficient* manner.

This comes from the work of grace which demands its incessant development in accomplishing in the soul the work of purification, so as to render it always more worthy of God and

better fitted to enjoy Him for all eternity.

3. This conclusion is based on three reasons drawn from the foundations of the supernatural life.

a) First, the mystic life, considered as we have done, is nothing else than the adult age of the Christian life, the full normal development of grace, even as the ripe ear of corn is the normal development of the growing blade.

Now, all souls in the state of grace are called to make the divine gift bear fruit within them by a good use of the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. These gifts in fact, in as much as they are *habitual dispositions* which render them docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, *grow,* as do the infused virtues, *according to the measure of charity;* and this ought here below always to be developed through acquired merits and by Holy Communion, according to the exigencies of the first precept of love, which has no limits —"with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength." All souls in the state of grace, therefore, *by reason of the grace that they possess,* are called to let it expand itself fully in the whole development of the mystic life.

b) Again, all souls in the state of grace are called to purify themselves from their faults, the least imperfections, and the consequences that result from them. This purification is accomplished either by mortifications which they impose on themselves (active purifications) or, and above all, by trials which it pleases God to subject them to (passive purifications).

Now, according to the masters of the spiritual life, those painful purifications, a sort of anticipated Purgatory, are of the order properly called mystic; that is to say, the Holy Ghost purifies here below souls fully generous, in such fashion that they shall not have to undergo after death, purification without merit in Purgatory. Hence, by the fact itself that God invites all souls in the state of grace to purify themselves unceasingly more and more from all their faults, He calls them to the mystic life.

c) A last reason is that every soul in the state of grace is by that very fact destined to enjoy God after its separation from the body. Heaven is the normal term of the development of the life of grace here below, in such sort that the soul *ought to be* in so perfect a disposition (though in fact it is very rarely so), as to re-

ceive the Light of Glory immediately after death without passing through the fires of Purgatory. No soul, in fact, shall pass through that place of suffering where it cannot merit any longer, except through its own fault, *i. e.*, for having neglected the grace received or offered.

Now, the perfect disposition for admission to the Beatific Vision immediately after the last sigh can only be the intense charity of a soul fully purified, together with the ardent desire of seeing God.

Every soul in the state of grace, then, from the fact that it is destined to enjoy the beatific union with God in eternity, and that as far as it depends on God immediately after death, is also called to the fruitive union here below by infused contemplation, and the mystic life.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Call to the Mystic Life. (II)

1. Having learned what is the mystic life, and what are the different manners in which the call to that life is given, we go on to study other considerations concerning it, and first it will be asked, in what way is the *individual* and *immediate* call to the mystic life given?

The signs by which God makes known this call are reduced to these three: and we must note them well.

(1) Meditation becomes impracticable. (2) The soul feels no desire to fix the imagination on any particular subject. (3) She takes delight in finding herself alone with God and fixing on Him her affectionate attention and regard.

St. John of the Cross sets forth these three signs with much precision in his "Obscure Night in the chapter on "Purifying Aridity":

"These aridities," he says, "can be the result, not of purifications of the sensitive appetite, but rather of certain sins or imperfections, spiritual sloth, or tepidity; or, it may be, of certain physical indispositions." I go then to point out some signs which will enable one to know when this aridity comes from purifications, and when it is the consequence of the vices I have named. "To my mind," he goes on, "there are three essential signs: The soul finds no more relish or solace in the things of God than she does in worldly things. In fact, God leads the soul into this *obscure night* in order to purify her; and by consequence He permits her not to relish or enjoy anything. If this aridity comes from some recent sin, the soul would then feel herself inclined to enjoy something other than God. Nevertheless, as this disgust of things above and below can come from a tendency to spiritual sloth, there is reason for pointing out a second sign. It is this. The memory experiences much difficulty in turning itself towards God, and hence, the soul has the impression of being no longer faithful to Him; for she has no longer relish for Him. This aridity proves that the soul is not the victim of sloth or of tepidity; for, tepid souls do not oc-

cupy themselves much with having any solicitude for the things of God. The third sign is the impotence which the soul feels in meditating and reasoning, in employing herself with the senses and the imagination, as she had done heretofore. The reason of it is that God commences to communicate Himself no longer by reasoning, but by the act of simple contemplation."

2. Again, what are the conditions requisite for the mystic life?

The principal conditions required for this life are above all interior. They generally accompany the *individual and immediate* call to contemplation.

Spiritual authors reduce them to five: (1) a great purity of heart, (2) simplicity of spirit, (3) a profound humility, (4) the practice of recollection and perseverance in prayer, (5) a fervent charity.

But we must see at the very first glance that there are certain interior and exterior dispositions and circumstances which render contemplation, and, by consequence, the mystic life very difficult. Such are: an atmosphere little favorable to silence, solitude, and long hours of

prayer: an unquiet and uneasy temperament; the cares of administration, teaching and preaching: the calls of charity; the want of appropriate direction.

Nevertheless, it does not seem that these obstacles are insurmountable. For the most part they are exterior; whereas, the dispositions favorable to contemplation and the mystic life are interior. It is possible to everyone of matured conscience, and especially to generous souls sufficiently strong to overcome them. It is with those obstacles as it is with those to be met with in the way of salvation. As to the latter, salvation is possible even for those who have not been brought up in a Christian atmosphere, or who have strong inclinations to evil, or who have not been able to hear the evangelic preaching: it is possible for them to attain salvation, I say, if they do what their consciences tell them. Even so: it is possible to earnest souls well-disposed and generous to overcome the obstacles to the mystic life, no matter how difficult they may appear, if they follow the lights of conscience. If they do, they will be conducted from grace to grace, and from fidelity to fidelity, even to life eternal.

3. A last question occurs: Can the graces of the mystic life be the object of merit?

Before answering this question, let me observe, first of all, that there are two sorts of merit: *viz.,* merit *de condigno,* as it is called; and merit *de congruo.* Merit *de condigno,* is that which is truly worthy of reward; it is founded on a formal promise of God. Merit *de congruo,* on the contrary, looks forward to a reward of fittingness; it is founded on a simple moral urgency, which the merciful Redeemer is pleased to grant without being obliged to it.

Now it is certain that the actual efficacious graces, the interior illuminations, and so forth, required for the elevation of the soul to contemplation, do not fall under the reward of merit properly so called. For we cannot merit *de condigno, i. e.,* as a matter of strict justice, any efficacious grace.

If, on the contrary, there is question of the increase of charity and the attaining of a more intimate union with God, which disposes to the mystic life, these graces fall under the designation of merit, rigorously so called.

Finally, nothing is opposed to this that we merit *de congruo, i. e.,* as a matter of fitness, the illuminations and inspirations of the Holy

Ghost which sustain contemplation and the mystic life; for God is pleased to reward those who generously respond to His call.

"By the progress of charity," remarks a learned Dominican, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, "we can arrive so as to merit in the proper sense of the word, *i. e., de condigno,* the higher degrees of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, considered as *habitual dispositions* connected with charity. Moreover, we merit by it, at least in a large sense (*saltem de congruo*) actual inspirations corresponding to those higher gifts; for, generally (and we can see the fitness of it) the Holy Ghost enlightens and inspires souls according to the degree of their habitual docility, their humility, and their love of God."

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The Necessity of a Spiritual Director

I

1. When mountain climbers essay to scale the higher and more giddy cliffs of Alpine regions, they usually place themselves under the direction of experienced guides, athletic men of hardy texture, who, from long acquaintance with the place, know every dangerous pass and precipice that is to be got over in order to arrive at the point of their adventure.

As in the athletic world, so also in the spiritual; when we would attempt to ascend to the higher ways of the spiritual life, common prudence dictates to us that we should do so only under the guidance of an experienced and prudent director who will conduct us in the way.

We have now, dearly beloved, studied the Christian and the interior life. We have marked the delicacy and the elevation of the latter and the difficulties with which it is beset,

and the dangers incident to those who alone and of their own initiative would attempt it. It becomes our duty now to consider the necessity of a spiritual director to those who would enter on this arduous and elevated way and who would pass on it with security to the end. That necessity is undeniable, and we shall have to refer to it again later on. The authority and the practice of the Church, as well as the real want of souls make of it a law from which it would be rash to emancipate oneself without a serious cause. Our spiritual advancement, it is true, comes not directly from men. God alone by His grace is the first and principal cause of it: and when God employs men to conduct us in the ways of virtue, it is always He who acts by the instruments He has chosen. For, as St. Paul says: "He who plants is nothing: he who waters is nothing. It is God who gives the increase." We have in reality only one Master, and this Master is Jesus Christ. It is not less true that the ordinary way, the most followed and the most sure, is to have a director. The priest is not only charged with the dispensation of the Sacraments, he has also received the mission to conduct us in the ways of perfection, to teach us the practice of the virtues, to preserve

us from the ambushes of the enemy,—in a word, to nourish our souls with truth.

2. We may meet with souls whom God conducts Himself by designs known to Him; but it is an exception, and no one should enter on this way without being certainly called to it. This is the teaching of the masters of the spiritual life. "We must know," says one of them, St. Vincent Ferrier, "that he who would have a director by whom he will allow himself to be conducted and whom he will obey in all his actions, small and great, will arrive more easily and quickly at perfection than he could do by himself, had he an extraordinary degree of intelligence, and books which explain to him the nature of all the virtues and the means of acquiring them." "I go further," he continues, "and say that our Lord, without whom we can do nothing, will never accord His graces to him who, having at his disposal a man capable of instructing and directing him, neglects this powerful means of sanctification, believing himself sufficient for himself, and that he can by his own power seek and find things useful for salvation. For this way of obedience is the royal way, which conducts men securely to the top of that mysterious ladder whereon the

Lord seems to lean. All the Fathers of the desert, and all those in general who have tended to perfection have followed this way, except it be that by the privilege of a grace all peculiar, God Himself has instructed certain souls who had no one to direct them; in that case the divine bounty supplies the exterior instruments, provided always that He finds a soul humble and enkindled with the desire of uniting herself to Him."

Nor is this teaching applicable only to beginners in the spiritual way. We can truly say that a director is necessary in all the degrees of the interior life. Those who commence have need to be encouraged and strengthened in the fight against their passions and evil tendencies. Those who advance will not make serious and solid progress in the practice of virtue, if through their own fault they walk without the help of a strong hand. Finally, those who already approach the term of the interior life are not dispensed by that fact from seeking light and counsel. On the contrary, the difficulties which occur even on the summits of divine contemplation oblige them to submit themselves to the decisions of a prudent and enlightened guide. No one, mark it well, is sufficient unto

himself. Such is the general and providential law.

3. After stating the necessity of a spiritual director, it is proper to say in what the office of a spiritual director consists. Well, the office of director has for its object all that concerns the spiritual advancement of souls who confide themselves to him:—the obstacles to be removed, the practice of virtue, the exercises of piety, the solution of doubts and cases of conscience, sometimes even the regulation of certain temporal questions, where the interests of souls are at stake. One can see from this that the office of director is as varied as the situation of souls is different. The direction of a soul that begins to give herself to God demands an attentive care, a paternal devotion, a persevering patience. To follow the progress of a generous soul who advances peaceably in the way of perfection by the beaten paths ordinarily does not demand exceptional knowledge and aptitude. But to serve as guide to souls called to the highest degrees of divine union, this is a mission often complicated and arduous, which calls for numerous and eminent qualities in regard to the triple point of view of knowledge, holiness, and discernment of spirits.

4. We can make a distinction between the spiritual direction which belongs to religious souls, and that of people in the world. In those two vocations there are things to be decided which have much resemblance to each other; but there are others that are altogether dissimilar. Above all, what must be considered in the government of souls are the duties of their state.

The object of direction is not subject to fixed and invariable rules, especially in matters of detail. Nevertheless, we shall signalize an important point which ought to govern all serious and truly supernatural direction. It is to apply souls to allow themselves to be conducted in all things, and principally in the way of renunciation and abnegation, by the most holy and amiable will of God. A direction which has for base and principle the filial and generous acquiescence in the divine will, cannot fail in producing abundant fruits of sanctification. This is without contradiction the most simple, the surest, and the most meritorious way to go to God.

II

Having shown the necessity of a spiritual

director in all the degrees of the interior life, and in what that office of director consists, we go on to study the importance of making choice of a good one.

In the spiritual life nothing is more important, for all are not equally efficient; and we have the example of St. Teresa and others of the emphasis they lay on this point, and of the danger and loss of merits souls suffer from the guidance of incompetent directors.

Here is, after a Dominican of the seventeenth century, the Venerable Father Billecok, an excellent abridgment of all that can be wisely and authoritatively said upon this matter:

"My Christian friend, who ask to be conducted in the way of God who seeks you wholly, it is very important that you choose a confessor who is a *man of God.* If he is not one himself, how will he direct you so as to make you one; and if he has no piety, how will he show you the practice of it? We do not speak here of bad confessors: but if there were bad ones, to place oneself under their direction would be to fall into the claws of wolves. It is that which we ought to fear. In order not to be deceived, behold the principal qualities that we

must look for in a confessor, be he secular or religious, before confiding to him the conduct of our souls. (a) He must be learned, enlightened with the lights of God, and well experienced in the direction of souls, capable of instructing you, of resolving your doubts, and directing you in the way in which God calls you. (b) He must be prudent, in order to have you do all things in the time, place, and manner that you ought to do them in order to correspond to the motion which the Holy Ghost has given you in them. (c) He must be chaste and disinterested, so as not to attach himself either to your person or your goods. (d) He should be mortified, humble, patient, sweet, charitable, disengaged from all that is in the world, modest, a man of prayer, and also virtuous, as a priest ought to be. It is more by his example than by his words that he ought to lead you to mortification, humility, patience, sweetness, charity, detachment, modesty, prayer, chastity, and all the virtues. He ought to have for you a true zeal which consists not in flattering you in your imperfections, but in not suffering in you any defect, and this in such a manner as not to cramp, but to open your heart so that you may discover to him en-

tirely its secrets. But the more important it is for the salvation of a soul to have a good confessor, the more she ought to recommend the choice of him to God. Let her pray to this good Master; let her invoke the saints; let her fast, go to Communion, and ask of the Holy Spirit to show her him whom He has chosen to direct her. When God has given you the grace to find a priest who has all the qualities of a good confessor, give thanks to Him. It is a treasure He has given you; and protest to Him that you will never employ him but for His glory and your own salvation."

NINTH CONFERENCE

How a Religious Is to Hold Herself in Regard to Her Spiritual Director

1. In our last conference I pointed out to you the necessity to every spiritual soul of a director, who will conduct her in the arduous way of the spiritual life, in what the office of spiritual direction consists, and the necessity of making choice of a good one.

Now I am aware that in a missionary country like ours, where religious are cast about wherever work for souls is to be done, it happens at times that experienced and enlightened directors are not to be found. What is to be done in these circumstances? St. Vincent Ferrier says: "We must have recourse to God with our whole heart, pray to Him with insistence and humility to intrust us Himself, and throw ourselves into His arms with an entire abandonment to His Divine Providence. Touched with our confidence, He will receive us with benevolence as poor orphans; for He

wishes not the death of anyone, but that all arrive at the knowledge of His truth." In this case pious readings chosen from the best authors can aid souls of good will who have no director. But when we are blessed with the presence of a competent director, here is how we are to conduct ourselves in his regard. We must in our relations with him show a great candor and an humble obedience of mind and heart. If we have these two dispositions, and if they are regulated in the one part and in the other with discretion, the office of spiritual director can produce only fruits of salvation.

When I say that we must conduct ourselves with openness and candor towards our spiritual director, I mean that we must endeavor to make ourselves known to him. The director cannot direct us without knowing us. We must then make known to him with great simplicity and openness of heart our evil leanings, our imperfections, our sins, our temptations, our darknesses, our disgusts for the things of God, our interior troubles, our lights, and our sentiments of devotion; in a word, all the evil and all the good that exists in our soul, without ever listening to pride or fear, and in a manner to facilitate the knowledge of our interior. This

openness, if it is discreet, exempt from communications foreign or little charitable, is one of the essential conditions of good direction. A soul has no right to complain of her director when she is habitually closed, taciturn, and enigmatical in her relations with him.

This is the teaching of one of the most learned of the women saints of the seventeenth century, Blessed Julienne Morell, O.S.D., who concludes by saying that in this we must valiantly combat and overcome our enemies and ourselves, who are the worst enemy we have.

2. As to the obedience we are to render to our spiritual director, it must be general and unconditional. The authority of a director represents to us the authority of God. We owe to him humble, discreet, and entire submission in all that concerns his ministry and our spiritual advancement. The authority of a superior in a community is evidently greater in certain respects than that of a simple director. The latter, as the name indicates, directs rather than commands, and if by way of exception he must command, this will not be *in virtue of holy obedience,* as in religion. It is not then a sin to disobey him, at least where this would not be in matters where conscience is otherwise

obliged, or in some circumstances of exceptional or extraordinary importance, where contempt would go directly against God. This restriction made, we ought to obey our spiritual director as God, whose place he holds. If he ordains or forbids anything, we must deem ourselves bound to hold to his decision at least where it is not impossible or a sin. This humble submission is necessary in the interior life; for, without it we shall do our own will and shall not be blessed by God.

The submission to a spiritual director can become more strict if one has obliged himself by vow to obey him. These sorts of engagements, let us say in passing, appear to us generally as less opportune, and they call for dispositions on the one part and on the other altogether exceptional in order to authorize them.

3. When I say that a spiritual soul should yield candor and obedience to her spiritual director, I do not mean to say that she may not at times have reason for changing directors. There may be reasons, and we have the example of the many directors from whom a St. Teresa and other holy souls sought direction, but at the same time it may be said that many

seek a change from frivolous motives, in which they are not justified, and in so doing act contrary to their spiritual advancement. A soul truly abandoned to the good pleasure of God, will never change her director from motives not strictly supernatural. The will of God is her sole guide and her most perfect stay.

It may be, too, that a spiritual director is at times an occasion of suffering to the soul whom he directs. What then?

This can happen, be it that God permits it in order to make us practise patience and renunciation; be it that the soul herself becomes the cause of it through her imperfect dispositions, such as the following of her own judgment, a too natural attachment, unjust suspicions, or a secret jealousy.

To mortify one's judgment is not an easy thing. If the director conducts us after our own natural inclinations, we approve of his manner of acting. If he contradicts us in our views or projects, we allow ourselves to fall into inquietude and murmuring. A subject wishes to fast, to practise abstinence, to lie on a hard bed, to wear a hairshirt, to practise a multitude of exercises according to her taste and her particular attractions. The director op-

poses these things, because he sees that they are not according to God's will; hence, sadness, discouragement, and tears.

4. A too natural attachment at times becomes the source of numerous interior crosses. St. Catherine of Siena in one of her letters points out this danger and indicates the remedy. "You love the creature spiritually in God," she says, "but sometimes, either through want of intention, or because the man has a nature that draws you to him you find a pleasure, an enjoyment which effects that often sensuality has its part in it under the appearance of spirituality. If you ask me, 'How can I perceive this imperfection in myself?' I will tell you. When you see that the person who is loved is wanting to you in something; that he is no longer in the same relations with you; if then you are displeased with him; if this displeasure weakens the affection you had for him; be assured that this affection was imperfect. What are the means of rendering it perfect? I will not indicate it to you in any other way than that taught by Truth itself to one of His servants, 'My well-beloved daughter,' Christ said to her one day, 'I wish not that you act as he who draws a vessel full of water from a foun-

tain, and who then drinks from it when it is drawn. The vessel becomes empty, and he does not perceive it. But I wish that when you fill the vessel of your soul, making of it through affection only one thing with him whom you love for Me, you draw not this vessel far from Me, who am the fountain of living water, but that you constantly keep this creature, whom you love for the love of Me, as the vessel in the well. In this manner you will never become empty, neither you nor he whom you love, but you will be always full of divine grace and of the most ardent fire of charity; and you will not fall into trouble or vexation. She who loves thus when she sees that he whom she loves is changed and separated from her society, is not afflicted, provided that she sees him persevere in sweet and solid virtues; for she loves him for God and not for herself. She feels, meanwhile, a holy emotion when she sees herself separated from him whom she loves. Such is the rule and the means that I wish you to take that you may become perfect!"

The counsel that is given us by St. Catherine of Siena deserves to be attentively meditated, and above all to be put into practice with great fidelity. It is on account of having too often

forgotten this, that the soul becomes its own tormentor by unjust suspicions and by feelings of jealousy. In fact, to believe that a director neglects our advancement and occupies himself only regretfully with our spiritual interests, is not only to hurt one's perfection, but it is also an incessant cause of trouble and agitation. Sometimes the soul is put in such a state of anguish that she becomes negligent in her exercises of piety and in the frequentation of the Sacraments. If jealousy comes to mix itself up with unjust suspicions, it is a source of disorders of every sort and becomes the height of evil.

SECOND BOOK

The Beginning of the Spiritual Life

The Purgative Way

FIRST CONFERENCE

The First Work in the Renovation of the Soul

1. "The first thing that an interior soul has to do in the work of her interior renovation is," say ascetic writers, "to remove the obstacles that oppose themselves to a union with God." Those obstacles are of three kinds—sins, vices, and imperfections.

That mortal sin is an obstacle to the supernatural and divine life is easy to comprehend, since mortal sin is incompatible with the formal principle of this life, which is grace. It is a wall of separation between God and us. Hence, the first work of the Holy Ghost in sinners is to efface mortal sin in justification.

The second obstacle to the interior life are

the vices or bad habits which, themselves products of sin, engender sin in turn. For just as the acquired virtues are habits produced by the repetition of acts; so the vices are the deplorable results of repeated acts of sin.

Finally, there are no imperfections which are not in a certain measure an obstacle to the full blossoming of the supernatural life in us.

The first thing, I say, an interior soul has to do, is to remove these obstacles.

As to mortal sin, I need not speak; for, as I have said, its presence in our soul is incompatible with the formal principle of the supernatural life, which is grace.

Neither need I labor to prove the necessity of removing venial sin from our soul. The resolution to avoid venial sin ought to exist not only in interior souls, but in all Christian souls. In fact, deliberate and habitual venial sin is one of the greatest obstacles to our sanctification. We ought to detest and avoid it as well because of the injury it does to God, as on account of the sad effects it brings on our souls. Venial sin, it is true, does not destroy charity; but it cools it and prevents it from striking out boldly. It does not cause the death of the soul, but it leaves it without strength and energy for

good. It disposes to mortal sin and aids it in the work of destruction: But for a truly interior soul the principal motive to avoid venial sin is that it displeases God. "He who fears God," says the Wise Man, "neglects nothing." (Eccl. vii, 19.)

2. We must go farther still. If we wish to avoid sin and make solid progress in the way of perfection; we must labor with a vigilant care towards the extirpation of our defects and bad habits which nourish in us the inclination to evil. It will not suffice to purify our heart by penance, by a good confession, by a general confession even; we must prepare to combat our vices and defects even in their roots, and particularly our predominant passion.

This presupposes that we lay bare the roots of our vices and defects by a searching examination of our interior. Now in searching into the secret roots of our vices and defects we are greatly helped by the writings of the great mystics, and especially of St. John of the Cross, who in his "Obscure Night of the Soul" would trace those defects to the same sources from which spring the seven capital sins. But without going with him into the detailed investigation of these, it seems to me that they can

all be traced to two capital sources—self-love, and pride.

Pride is "the root of all evil," according to Scripture. And without doubt if we search for the source of most of the defects we fall into, we shall find that pride of some sort or other was at the bottom of them. It is the source, not only of the self-esteem which makes us prefer ourselves before all others, and to wish to hold the first place always and everywhere, and of the sullen humor which causes us to resent correction for our faults; but also of that love of ostentation which makes us seek our own glory, even when we would have it appear we were serving God. It was the first vice that made its appearance in God's universe, in Heaven, and in Paradise. It is the one that most resists God and prevents the entrance of grace into our souls; and hence, in return, as we are told in Scripture, "God resists the proud," and, again: "He scatters the proud in the conceits of their hearts."

As to self-love, it is the most inveterate, the most vivacious, the most vehement and far-reaching of our passions.

Although this love be natural; although it come from God, and is, by consequence, good,

as long as it is contained within just lines; it is, nevertheless, in practice very often vicious because of its excesses. It is in truth of it, and of it alone that are generated all the evil passions and all the disorders of our life. Hence St. Thomas does not hesitate to say that disordered self-love is the principle of all sin. To combat self-love successfully, therefore, is to dry up the source of our guilty desires: it is to keep ourselves pure from sin.

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Particular Examen

I

1. Our former conference has shown us that the first thing a devout soul has to do in the work of her interior renovation, is to remove the obstacles that oppose themselves to a union with God. These obstacles are sins, vices, and defects of every kind. To combat those defects and vices in their sources, we must watch carefully over our interior, and wherever we find ourselves seeking our own advantage, or wherever a secret pride influences our actions, we must mortify those passions and root them out of our hearts. In order to do this we must make use of all the means employed by, and counselled by the saints, and especially that known in religious life as the *particular examen.* This is a means made use of universally by interior souls in their efforts for perfection, and we must not, since perfection is the

end of our life, neglect a single means given us by God for its attainment.

2. What is the particular examen? The particular examen consists, first of all, in this, that we seek out and separate in our mental vision that fault or defect which is the chief cause of holding us from God, and which, moreover, is the cause of most of our failings; in other words, our predominant passion. Or, we examine ourselves carefully and find out what is the virtue we are most wanting in, considering ourselves absolutely or in relation to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Having found out this predominant fault, or this most needful virtue, we set ourselves by a particular direction to watch over our conduct, and strive for the rooting out of this fault, or for the acquirement of this virtue. In this we act like a skillful commander when he sets himself to overcome an enemy or to get possession of a line of country. He does not make an attack all along the line of his enemy's battalions. He strives rather to get possession of some position of importance which dominates the enemy's lines, or cuts off his source of supplies, feeling assured that if he gains it, he will be master of the country, and have his antagonist in his

power. So in the spiritual warfare, it is bad tactics to set ourselves to root out defects in a general manner or to acquire the religious virtues wholesale. We must, like a skillful commander, lay the weight of our attack on the principal stronghold of the enemy, and not spend our energies on things which in the spiritual life, are more or less matters of detail. We must boldly attack our predominant passion, no matter how strongly entrenched it may be, or how powerful it may have become by long continued possession, or how secure by our weak submission to its usurpation, feeling assured that if we overcome it, all our weaker enemies will submit themselves to us without much resistance. We must try to gain possession of the most influential virtues, knowing that if those are acquired, all the supplementary ones will be ours also, and we shall gain an advance all along the line and become masters of perfection.

This means and this method of the particular examen is one that has been employed universally and with vigor by spiritual souls, by those who were earnest in their spiritual regeneration. On the contrary, the tepid in religious life, slothful, languishing, worthless souls, em-

ploy it only fitfully or not at all. As a consequence they are always beginners, if indeed they have even begun; and are found as imperfect, as unmortified, as unspiritual, at the end of a long life in religion, as they were on the day they put on the holy habit; and their confessions to the end of their life are but a languid repetition of the sins and imperfections they brought with them from the world.

II

And now, as to the method of making the particular examen and the time to be given to it, I need not speak, since you have practised this exercise from the time of your entrance into religion. Let me only exhort you to see that it be employed assiduously, and not merely as a matter of daily routine. Here particularly we must conduct ourselves as industrious workers in the garden of our souls. A skilled gardener who takes an intelligent interest in his work will not be content with merely shearing down from time to time the weeds that are ever making their appearance in his garden; nor will he allow the soil to run fallow. He will, on the contrary, with pick and

hoe strive to eradicate them utterly, and stock the soil with useful plants and herbs.

And so we must not be content with merely taking a daily record of our faults against the rule, or the virtues of our state, and registering a languid aspiration after perfection. We must by means of the particular examen pursue those faults to their sources, which lie hidden deep in our nature, and tear them out utterly through compunction and penance. We must lay hold unswervingly of the virtues that most directly conduct us to perfection, crying out unceasingly with the Psalmist: "Create a clean heart within me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels." "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strenghten me with a perfect spirit." "I will teach the unjust Thy ways, and the wicked shall be converted to Thee" (and) "if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it."

2. Now, let me conclude this conference by quoting from two of the most judicious among the writers on ascetic theology, some passages upon the duty of watching over ourselves, and upon the examen of our conscience. "Those two things," says Maynard, "are confounded generally in practice and are as ancient in the

interior life as is the struggle of our souls against the attractions of corrupt nature. One would be wrong to assign them a recent origin, and in considering their use as purely facultative in the point of view of our spiritual advancement. The examen can have very diverse methods which pious souls are free to embrace according to the attraction of grace; but this exercise considered in itself is founded on the nature of our condition always militant here below. We must unceasingly watch and pray, if we would not enter into temptation. On this important point," he continues, "we shall cite the Venerable Tauler, the great Dominican mystic of the fourteenth century, witness of the mystic traditions of the earlier centuries. He will speak to us with great authority. 'A man,' says he, 'must be the severe guardian and observer of himself, and of his interior senses, and of all his faculties; so that he have eyes, ears, words, acts, or desires, only for things which are necessary for him. He will watch over his exterior senses to the whole extent of his power, for fear that strange images may carry him away and stop his progress. He will hold himself always in recollection, and prevent his senses from getting dis-

sipated and running after creatures. He will have always present to his mind the life and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make of it the continual subject of his meditations, with a sincere desire and a firm resolution to imitate Him, and will form his life and will regulate all his acts on the model of this most perfect life . . . in patience, humility, resignation, temperance, justice, truth, and in all virtue. And when he shall find himself unlike Him, he will plunge himself into a profound humility, where considering his baseness and nothingness he will cast himself with confidence into the arms of the divine mercy, praying God to assist him in the extreme poverty and indigence to which he sees himself reduced. Meanwhile, the interior man ought to do everything in his power, to spare nothing to die to this criminal work in all his vices; in his self-love, in his own will, in his own judgment, in his pleasure, and in his self-esteem. It is then absolutely necessary that each one watch attentively and carefully over his interior, and that wherever he sees himself seeking himself, he mortify himself, and learn to seek in all things only the most holy and adorable will of God."

THIRD CONFERENCE

Of Some Imperfections of Beginners in Regard to Pride.

I

1. It is usual with ascetic writers, when treating of the subject of vices and imperfections, to attach them to the sources whence proceed the seven capital sins. St. John of the Cross presents us with a very exact and satisfying description of the defects to which those are exposed who begin to give themselves to God. As examples of the teaching of this great Doctor, and, indeed of the whole Carmelito-Dominican school of ascetic theology, I will reproduce his words treating of the defects of beginners in regard to pride and spiritual gluttony.

"Although," he says, "holy and divine things of themselves inspire us with humility, nevertheless, beginners often, through their own fault, receive impressions I know not how of a

certain secret pride; and this because they reflect too much on their fervor and eagerness in the exercises of piety. They have then a certain complacency in themselves and in their actions, and they are very much carried to speak of spiritual things and to pose as masters rather than as disciples. They judge others, and condemn them in their heart because they do not practise devotion in the same manner as they do. And sometimes they give out their sentiments before others, like in this to the Pharisee, who in praising God prides himself on his own works and despises the Publican. It is often the devil who animates them to fervor and inspires them to take up such or such good works in order to feed their presumption, for the enemy of the human race is not ignorant that acts proceeding from pride, in place of being profitable, hurt them. Some even arrive at such a degree of blindness that they wish to be considered as alone good; this is why on every occasion they blame their neighbor and destroy his reputation as much as they can. Always carried to detraction, they cry out against the mote that may be found in another's eye, but they cannot see the beam that is in their own; they screen out a fly in

regard to the conduct of others, and swallow a camel in regard to their own. They so ardently desire to be praised and esteemed that if their spiritual director does not approve of their spirit and manner of living they imagine they are not understood, and at once conclude that those directors understand nothing about spirituality. They are eager then to quit them and seek to place themselves under the direction of men who are of their own way of thinking. On the contrary, you see them fly as one flies death, and even work up an aversion for, those whose disapprobation is designed to put them on the right way. Full of confidence in themselves, they plan great projects, but scarcely ever execute them. Desirous of drawing attention to their kind of spirituality and to their devotion, they affect to show it off, take strange attitudes, emit sighs, and deliver themselves up to a thousand other airs. It is rather in public than in secret that they have raptures, and they are very much pleased to see divulged these extraordinary effects, objects of their ardent desire, but of which the devil is, no doubt, the chief agent. They desire much to be in favor with their spiritual director; hence, a thousand anxieties and inquietudes. They feel shame and

an extreme repugnance to declare their sins clearly, for fear of falling off in the esteem of their confessor.

"Furthermore, in order to hide the malice of their sins, they color them; they try to excuse them rather than to accuse themselves of them. Many among them go to a strange confessor in order to confess to him their grave sins, so that their own confessor, discovering in them nothing reprehensible, may believe them perfect. They are eager to speak to him of the good that takes place within them, often in exaggerated terms, which causes him to esteem them much, and they intentionally represent it to him as greater than it is in reality. Would it not show more humility in this matter to try to diminish this good and to desire that neither the confessor nor anyone else may attach to it the least importance? There are some who habitually think lightly of their faults, while at other times they afflict themselves beyond measure because they have a high opinion of their own holiness; they are irritated and impatient with themselves, a thing that denotes a new imperfection. Often they anxiously ask our Lord to be delivered from their defects and evil tendencies, but it is much more that

they may not have to suffer from them and that they may live in peace rather than that they may be agreeable to God. They do not reflect that their deliverance would perhaps be a motive to become still prouder. Enemies of praise in regard to others, they love it in their own case, and often seek it with eagerness. They are like the foolish virgins whose lamps became extinguished and who solicited from their companions the oil destined to replenish them.

"Among those who deliver themselves to such imperfections many allow themselves to commit grave faults and receive from them an immense evil; as for others, the irregularity is slight and the evil less. Some experience only the first touches of it, *but there are very few beginners* who in the time of their first fervor are completely exempt from it."

II

1. You will ask, what must we do to contend with success against the defects that spring from pride?

We must take a way entirely opposed to that we have described and become penetrated with sentiments of true humility. This we shall do

by considering the infinite greatness of God, the abyss of our own misery, and the imperfections without number in all the works on which we may be tempted to pride ourselves. It is thus that those who are truly enlightened on the interior and supernatural life force themselves to think and act.

"Those who follow the rules of perfection," continues St. John, "proceed in an entirely different manner and with a different disposition. For it is above all in humility that they commence to advance and strengthen themselves. They count their works as nothing and have no esteem for themselves. All others seem to them superior to themselves, and their virtues excite in their hearts a holy envy, a laudable emulation. The more their fervor increases, the more they do good works and find attractions in them, the more also they advance in humility, the more are they made cognizant of all they owe to God and of the little they do for Him. Their ardent charity and their love urge them eagerly to undertake good works for God. Taken up with this want and this solicitude of love, they are never satisfied with themselves. They close their eyes to what others do or do not do, and if they take notice of them,

it is solely, as I have said, with this thought that others far surpass them. Esteeming themselves little, they desire that others have the same opinion of them and that they blame and despise their works, and even should one praise them and show consideration for them, they cannot believe them in any way, and it seems to them strange to hear so much good said about them.

"Those humble and peaceful souls ardently desire to receive the advice of all who can contribute to their spiritual progress. What a difference between their conduct and the conduct of the beginners, of whom we have spoken! These would wish to teach the whole world, but when one would appear to wish to teach them something, they hasten to take up the word, as if they already knew all that he had to say to them.

2. "But the humble of whom we speak have a care not to wish to lift themselves up as masters of anyone. As they are content to walk in their own humble way, and even to change it at the first accent of command, the idea never comes into their head of relying on themselves in anything. They are happy to hear others praised, and their sole regret is their not serv-

ing God with the same perfection as they. They never speak of what concerns themselves, and they show no desire to speak of it. Far from that, it is a subject of confusion to them to be obliged to give an account of their good acts and experiences to their spiritual directors; for in their judgment, these are things that deserve not to be spoken of. But what they love is to make known their faults and sins, and they take care to give the impression that there is not in them any virtue. In their eyes it is good fortune to have to treat of the affairs of their soul with those who make no account of their virtues or their works. This manner of acting is the result of a pure, simple, and sincere mind, and God deems it very agreeable.

The Spirit of divine wisdom resides in those humble souls, and His first inspiration is to incline them to hide their treasures in the depths of their heart and to allow only their bad side to appear abroad. God refuses this singular grace to the proud, whilst He accords it to the humble, at the same time that He does their other virtues."

Those generous souls would willingly give their heart's blood for those who serve God. They feel themselves drawn to aid them with

all their power. In the imperfections into which they may fall they support themselves with humility and meekness, with a loving fear, and a firm hope in God. "Be persuaded," St. John continues, "that it is a very small number of souls to whom it is given to advance thus from the beginning with such perfection. For the most part we content ourselves with not seeing them fall into the contrary defects." This is why God, as the Saint shows later on, causes to enter into the "obscure night of the soul" those whose progress He wishes to hasten, and whom He desires to purify from all imperfections.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Defects of Beginners in Regard to Spiritual Gluttony

I

1. A subject that must by no means be passed over when treating of the defects of beginners is spiritual gluttony. Spiritual gluttony is nothing else, according to St. Thomas, but "an inordinate appetite for spiritual delights." It can be a mere defect or a sin according to the degree to which it is carried, for that is said to be a sin which departs from the order of right reason in which the good of virtue consists.

There is much to be said on this subject, for, according to St. John of the Cross, "you scarcely meet a single beginner, no matter how fervent otherwise his first steps in the spiritual life may be, who does not fall into one of the numerous imperfections to which the sweetness of the beginning in the interior life gives birth. Many of them, seduced by the allurements of

those consolations seek to satisfy their spiritual gluttony, in place of making efforts to acquire purity of heart and true devotion, which alone merit to draw the regards and complaisance of God in the matter of spirituality. Besides the fault which those souls commit in seeking these favors, gluttony, which is their predominant fault, makes them pass from one extreme to the other. They pass the limits of a just moderation in which virtue resides and where it is perfected.

"The practices of piety have such a strong attraction for beginners that some kill themselves by dint of penances, while others weaken themselves by prolonged fasts above their strength without the order or counsel of anyone. Sometimes they seem to desire to hide themselves from those whom they are bound to obey in all these things. Often even in spite of the prohibitions of their directors they give themselves up to austerities. These beginners are unreasonable and very imperfect. They forget that submission and obedience constitute the true penitence of reason and judgment. This is the sole sacrifice worthy of being offered to the Lord, the one He prefers to all the acts of corporal penance.

2. "This penitence, although good in itself, is very imperfect if it is not accompanied with spiritual penitence, because souls are drawn to it solely in view of the consolations they find in it.

All extremes are bad, and as this manner of acting is founded only on one's own will, in place of bringing about an advance in virtue, it brings about a growth in evil. There is in all this spiritual gluttony and pride, since it comes not from obedience. With a great number the devil strengthens the passion of gluttony by exploiting their tastes and appetites. Obedience is to those souls a galling and heavy yoke. Furthermore, in default of other things, they change, modify, or amplify what is commanded them. Many arrive at such an excess that they lose all attraction for the exercises exacted by obedience. They are carried to follow in all things their own caprice and taste.

It would perhaps be better for them to abstain from such practices of which their own will is the sole motive.

They are often seen to persist with their spiritual directors in order to obtain what they want, and partly by force they wrest their consent. If they do not obtain what they want,

they become sad and pout like children. They imagine they do not serve God if they are prevented from following their own inclinations. They have for their basis their own will and whim. If one tries to put it aside and to substitute for it the will of God, they are afflicted, become remiss and discouraged. In their estimation, to satisfy themselves and to be content is to honor God and to be agreeable to Him.

3. "There are to be found those in whom the passion of gluttony destroys the remembrance of their baseness and misery, and puts in forgetfulness the respect and loving fear due to the greatness of God. They have no scruple in importuning their confessors, in order to wrest from them permission to confess and communicate frequently. More regrettable still it is to see them push their audacity so far even as to dare to receive the Holy Eucharist without the authorization of the priest, thus giving way to their own personal judgment. They strive to conceal the truth from their directors and make some kind of a confession, preöccupied more with the desire of participating in the Sacred Banquet than with the care of approaching it with the required purity and

holiness. Such audacity prepares them for great evils, and they ought to fear the chastisement of their temerity. With those imperfect desires it would be more salutary and more becoming for them to ask their confessor not to send them to the Holy Table so often, although in these two extremities it is best to have an humble resignation.

"All their effort is to find sensible effects in Communion, in place of applying themselves to praise and honor with all humility the God who is in them. Convinced that consolations are due to them, if this source dries up, they fancy themselves to lose their time. It is to lower God in their esteem and not to know that sensible taste is the least of the advantages that flow from the Most Holy Sacrament whose principal fruit is invisible grace. In fact God, in order to bring souls to approach Him in the simplicity of faith, often removes from them those favors and sensible sweetnesses.

4. "These mistaken souls would wish, moreover, in all their other spiritual exercises to taste God and feel Him, as if He were accessible and comprehensible. This is a gross error,

very much opposed to the divine attributes, which demand of us a pure faith. The same principles accompany them at prayer. They seek to procure sensible devotion by right or wrong, as they say.

"They tire and exhasut themselves in vain. If they fail in gaining their end, they are inconsolable, and the extreme repugnance they feel to give themselves anew to prayer makes them abandon it altogether.

"This insatiable desire for enjoyment causes them to lose true devotion, which consists in persevering in prayer with patience, humility, and distrust of themselves, for the sole love of God. We have then a right to compare them to children who act not from reason but sensuality. All their time is passed in seeking joys and spiritual consolations. They are not satisfied with reading and with changing entirely the subject of their meditations, and they run without ceasing in the pursuit of their pleasure in the things of God.

"But by a conduct just, discreet, and full of love the Lord refuses it to them, because if this spiritual gluttony were always nourished, it would draw them into evils without end. It

is then indispensable to them to enter into the "obscure night" in order to purify themselves from all those puerilities.

"The search after sensible joys draws after it another great imperfection, namely, laxity and apathy in walking in the rude ways of the cross. The soul that has a thirst for enjoyment naturally feels a repulsion for all that comes under the name of self-abnegation; whence result many other defects, to which the Lord will bring a remedy in His own time by temptations and dryness and tribulations, all of which makes part of the "obscure night." Without pretending to enumerate them here, I will content myself to add that sobriety and spiritual temperance follow a very different way, of fear, mortification, and humble submission in all things. I remark, furthermore, that the perfection and the value of the acts come not from their multiplicity, but from the knowledge and renunciation of self. It is to this renunciation that we ought to apply ourselves as much as possible, till God Himself deigns to undertake the work of our purification in the "obscure night" into which He draws us.

II

Lest we be led to take a distorted view of God's dealings with us, let me ask, is it not sometimes permitted and even lawful to desire sensible devotion?

To stop at sensible devotion as the end of our perfection, to love God for ourselves and not for Him, is an abuse that we have already sufficiently condemned; but to despise and reject sensible devotion absolutely would be a presumption which the Church condemns. It is permitted in certain cases to desire sensible devotion, for it is then very useful to our spiritual advancement. Thus, he who desires with humility sensible devotion in order to give himself more completely to God, seeks not himself and falls not into any imperfection. It is a means that he believes useful to go to God, to surmount temptations and practise virtue with more energy and courage. As to the rest, God who knows our misery and frailty nourishes almost always beginners with the milk of sensible devotion, in order to lead them more efficaciously to contempt of earthly things and to the search after supernatural goods. Indeed

the pleasure that we find in doing a good action excites us to do it well and often aids us to overcome obstacles. We can say also that the simultaneous concurrence of all our powers, intellectual and sensible, far from being absolutely contrary to the work of our perfection, is sometimes favorable to it in virtue of a reciprocity of action which exists between the inferior and the superior part of our soul, which tends to develop in us a disposition of obedience and fidelity to the precepts of divine love. Sensible devotion, submissive and conformed to the will of God, is then in certain cases a means of arriving at divine union. It is a gift of God: the important thing is not to abuse it.

Bossuet explains the *rôle* of sensible devotion in the interior life as follows: "Piety, when still weak, has need of a more sensible sweetness. God seems to wish at first to gain the senses and as it were the exterior of the soul, in order to insinuate Himself into its depths. It is that which we call joy, sweetness, coaxing expressions, consolations. Then are shed pious tears, sweeter than all joys, because they are the fruit of a holy dilation of the

heart, which pours itself out before the Lord with a pure and inexplicable pleasure. We need not imagine that this chaste sweetness, which is the stay of nascent piety, is any other thing than a gift of God. It is true that nature can counterfeit it, but then it is not this sensible sweetness that is the support of commencing piety; it is rather a bait of self-love, which does not concern us here. It is sufficient to have established the fact that these first sweetnesses which we call sensible in the beginning of piety are the result of grace."

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Government and Moderation of the Passions

I

1. When a machine has met with some accident and its mechanism has become deranged or broken, it must needs be sent back to the workshop and have its several parts righted before it can be in a position to give again effective service to its owner.

Our human nature met with a great accident in the beginning of its days in the fall of our First Parents. As a result of that accident we are all born in original sin. Now original sin, in addition to the dis-esteem and hatred it has generated in the mind of God towards us, has deeply wounded the faculties of our soul. As the Catechism says: "It has darkened our understanding, weakened our will, and left in us a strong propensity to evil."

When our Lord redeemed us by His death

upon the cross, and when, as a result, we recovered His grace and friendship, it was not His will to restore us to the prerogatives of our first creation.

These prerogatives we can in good part recover only with the help of self-discipline and prayer. This self-discipline is called in the langauge of the mystics, the interior reformation of the soul. It is brought about in three domains, corresponding to the three sets of faculties and powers with which we are endowed, and it is designated respectively: the Government and Moderation of the Passions; the active purification of the Senses; and the active purification of the Soul, *i. e.,* in its faculties of mind and will.

Let us speak to-day of the first work of self-reformation, namely, the government and moderation of the passions, and first, I will explain what are the passions; for many have a false and repellent notion concerning them. Now the passions are nothing else than the motions of the sensitive appetite;—motions which are produced in us at the sight of sensible good or evil shown us by the imagination.

The name of passions applied to the motions of the sensitive appetite comes from this

that we suffer in a physical and passive manner the influence of impressions which come to us by the senses. The passions modify the body even physically, and especially the heart. In every passion, according to St. Thomas, something is added to, or taken from, the motion of the heart, since there is contraction or dilation as a result of the impressions received.

2. And now as to their utility, let me say that they are so many forces planted in our nature by God to help us in our operations. Just as the Creator planted in the physical world certain forces—wind, steam, heat, electricity, etc., to bring about operations useful or necessary in the realms of nature and art; so He planted in our lower nature certain tendencies or powers to enable us to carry out our operations, whether in the physical or the moral order. Such are: love, fear, desire, hope, aversion, etc. The passions are, therefore, by nature good, and the gifts of an almighty and beneficent Creator, who bestows them on us in order to help us in our works, and to effect in us spiritual and physical well-being.

But we are to remember that those forces, beneficent in their nature and given us by

God to be the willing agents of our spiritual powers, have been vitiated by sin, and by their vehemence and ill-direction may carry us to excess and disaster. Just as the wind, one of the forces of nature, when it blows in moderation, brings about many beneficent results, purifies the air, tempers the heat of the sun, distributes a salutary moisture, carries ourselves and our merchandise to the ends of the earth,—but if it breaks out in a storm, spreads devastation far and wide, destroys the works of man, and strews the coasts with wreck and ruin.

Of this evil tendency of our passions begotten by sin the Apostle often complains, as when he says: "I find a law in my members contradicting the law of my mind"; "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "The evil I hate, that I do; but to do the good I love, that I am not able."

3. Such being the case with our interior, and our passions being deranged and insubordinate, we must, with the help of prayer, and by a rigid course of self-discipline, labor towards their rectification, so that they may become again the strong right arm of the will

in the carrying out of God's behests and in the fulfillment of rectitude and virtue.

Speaking then of the passions in their moral bearing, and without going into detailed philosophical explanations concerning them, let me say that, considered as purely natural propensities, as simple motions of the sensitive appetite, they are neither good nor evil; but they can be good or evil according to the direction they take, or which we give them. Their moral value depends on their submission or resistance to the sway of reason. The good and the bad fear, desire, rejoice; but the wicked, by inclining themselves in an irregular manner towards a guilty end, have bad fears, bad desires, bad joys; whilst the good, being submissive to reason, have only good fears, good desires, good joys, good anger, etc. The fruits always bear the nature of the tree that produces them.

The sensitive appetite is an element of our nature. Now, virtue does not destroy nature; it perfects it. To arrive at this end in what concerns our passions, we ought to cut away what is unruly, moderate their movements, and keep them under the laws of reason. When they are thus submissive and well directed, they can

serve a useful purpose in the practice of virtues. The Stoic sect of philosophers did not observe in man the difference that exists between the intellectual and the sensitive powers, and, as a consequence, they were ignorant of the distance that separates reason from the sensitive appetite; otherwise, they would not have made virtue consist in an exemption from all passion, and they would have left to the sensitive appetite its legitimate sphere of action.

To restore health to a man it is not necessary to destroy all the humors that are found in his body, but it suffices to re-establish them in a just equilibrium. The work of virtue does not then consist (and it is good for us to remember this) in annihilating and plucking out of the soul the natural movements and propensities of the sensitive appetite, but in directing them with the help of reason.

Often, it is true, the passions are accepted in bad part because they become too impetuous or too soft in their movements or are turned from their natural end, which is the attainment of good comformable to right reason. Those passions evidently ought to be combated without cessation. Sometimes also the passions

creep imperceptibly into our actions and escape the supervision of reason; but then we have no responsibility for them; neither do we draw any merit from them; for there is found in them neither moral good nor evil.

II

1. I have allowed myself to dilate a little on the nature of the passions, in order to show from the beginning the possibility of moderating them. For if the passions in themselves are neither good nor bad, and if all depends on the direction given them by reason, we can hope to draw from them large help in the work of our sanctification. Without doubt the passions, such as they exist to-day, after original sin, enter no longer with the same harmony into the divine plan as they did before the Fall. Vitiated and subjected to the influence of a corrupt flesh, they can hurt us, and they do hurt us in fact by their indiscreet and unwholesome direction. Nevertheless, with the aid of God they still procure energy and fruitful action to those who know how to employ them. The Jews faithful to the law of God are praised in holy Scripture because, as is said in the book of Machabees (1 Mach. xi,

44), "they struck sinners in their anger, and the wicked in their indignation." And in the same book (v, 4) it is said of Mathathias, their chief: "He was seized with grief, and his reins trembled; and his fury was kindled according to the spirit of the law; and casting himself forward, he killed a certain Jew on the altar," —a memorable act, fruit of a holy zeal and of a love of justice which proves the utility of the passions in the service of reason.

The will has great power over our passions. This power, alas, is not so absolute as that passion cannot forestall reason, or persevere in spite of it. Often we can say with the Apostle that "we feel in our senses a law contradicting the law of reason"; but in this case passion ceases to be imputable according to the measure that liberty is wanting.

One resource remains to the will, that is, to remove as far as possible the objects that excite our disordered passions. We can thus fly from an object that irritates us, or refuse to anger the means to satisfy itself. For this there is need of a sustained attention and an energetic will. There alone the will commands and turns our passions to God. This work is specially reserved to the moral virtues.

"The strength of the soul," says St. John of the Cross, "resides in its powers and passions, all of which are under the direction of the will. If the will leads them to God and removes them from what is not of Him, it preserves for God all the strength of the soul, which then loves God as much as it can love Him. . . . One directs the passions towards God when he employs them according to right reason, that is, when the soul rejoices only in what touches the glory and honor of God; when it hopes in Him alone; when it is afflicted only at what wounds Him; and when it is stricken only with the fear of displeasing Him. The more the soul takes complacency in transient things; the less it places its content in God; and thus, of the other passions. . . . The disordered passions engender in the soul all the vices and imperfections; whilst regulated and well-directed by the will, they can produce all the virtues."

2. In order to govern our passions, we must take into account the natural causes which can produce them. Our passions are undoubtedly subject to a multitude of natural influences, to which we ought to have regard in order to govern and direct them with success. We shall

only indicate here the different natural causes which act on them.

All ages of life have passions which are peculiar to themselves. Infancy and youth, maturity and old age, have tastes and propensities very different. The sexes augment the difference already very much cut up. Here it is physical force that dominates, there it is imagination and sentiment. Temperament and constitution come to add a true labyrinth of psychological combinations, of which the principal are produced by the constitutions, nervous, bilious, lymphatic, and melancholic. We must also take account of the ordinary nourishment, climate, maladies, social position, education, occupation, amusement; in a word, of all that can exercise an influence upon the senses and the imagination, and by consequence upon the sensitive appetite.

To know and to study the natural causes which solicit our passions is an important thing, whether there be question of giving them a more perfect equilibrium or a better direction, or whether one seeks simply to state facts and to characterize them from a moral point of view.

Not to prolong this conference, let me say

that "we must absolutely repress all our unruly passions, great and small, in order to arrive at union with God. As to the irregular and voluntary movements of the sensitive appetite, the soul ought to purify herself and disengage herself from them completely, not only from the graver ones, which lead to mortal sin, but also from the lesser, which lead to venial sin, and even from the slightest, which cause the soul to fall into a thousand imperfections. Without this we cannot hope to arrive at an entire union with God. In fact, this union consists in the total absorption of the human will by the divine will, in such a manner that the latter is always and everywhere its sole motor. . . . In order to unite herself by the will and by love to her Sovereign Good, the soul must renounce every wilful unruly appetite, however small it may be; that is to say, she ought not knowingly and willingly to consent to any imperfection. She must even come to possess herself in such a manner as to repress the first motions of evil passion from the moment they present themselves. . . . As to deliberate and entirely wilful appetites, even when they would carry themselves towards an object of little importance, they must be morti-

fied, as they may become an obstacle to grace. We must labor energetically to make even transient acts coming from them to disappear. But defects which one never succeeds in correcting arrest the progress of the soul and form an invincible barrier to the divine union."

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Active Purification of the Senses. (I)

I

1. Working interior renovation is, as we have seen, a science. It is the most perfect and fruitful of all sciences, since it regulates our relations with God and teaches us to direct all our actions to His love and service. It is a science speculative and practical at the same time. Hence, the strenuousness of the work we have taken in hand. It, moreover, prepares us for the highest actions of which a creature is capable—the contemplation of God in His essence, and the uniting ourselves to Him by love.

In the prosecution of this science we have already brought under view one domain of our varied and complex nature, namely, that of our passions, and we have studied the manner of so governing and moderating them that their operations may be in accord with the

dictates of right reason and made to coöperate with the action of grace in our souls.

Allied to and accompanying the duty of governing and moderating the passions incumbent on the soul that aspires to perfection is the duty of the active purification of the senses.

Let me treat of this important, if somewhat dry and technical subject to-day. The active purification of the senses consists in the submitting of all our experiences and all our longings of the sensitive order to the government of the mind and will. The mind and will will in turn submit themselves to God, and we shall thus re-establish, as far as it depends on us, the order and harmony which ought to preside over our interior renewal.

2. That we must, in order to advance in the spiritual life, submit the inferior part of our nature to the superior, is a truth quite elementary. It is not rare that the operations of the mind and of the senses reciprocally cramp each other, whether it be that they divide our attention, or that the intellect mixing itself up in some fashion with sensible operations, helps to tarnish the purity of its operations. For the rest, the end which we propose to

ourselves in the interior life, and we are to keep it before us continually, is to unite ourselves intimately with God by contemplation and love. Now, in order to arrive at the most perfect acts of intimate union with God, we must shut out all images of creatures, *even good ones,* which can become obstacles to the purity which God demands of us. When our Lord in the Gospel pronounced the Beatitude: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God," He did not speak merely of the cleanness coming from the perfect observance of the virtue of chastity. He spoke of that perfect purity of thought and affection which shuts out from the mind and heart all thought of, and all affection for, creatures, and which leaves them wholly occupied with the contemplation and love of God.

Just as pure gold admits not of being mixed with the least alloy of baser metals: so the cleanness of heart which God demands of the perfect soul must have no alloy *of thought or affection* coming up from the inferior powers. And only when the soul is cleansed from these, is she admitted to the embraces of the Spouse and made wholly His. He then shows Himself intimately and most fully to the beloved and

discloses to her secrets which it is not given to the tongue of man to tell. And she in turn is "made like Him," because as far as her present state allows, "she sees Him as He is." This favored state is attained only as the result of long wrestling with the imperfections of nature, and of a course of self-discipline which shuts out the experiences coming up from the senses, and of the resistance offered to the imperfections coming from the other powers. This resistance and self-discipline is called, "the mortification of the senses."

3. Our Lord well explains this to His servant, St. Catherine of Siena, as we read in her *Dialogues*. "My beloved daughter," He says, "in man the will is the principal gate which guards the soul. I have made it a present of a liberty strong and independent. I never allow the devils and the other enemies of man to open and force this gate unless free will consents to it. But I permit them often to attack and break open the other gates of the soul. The city of the soul has many gates. It has three principal ones. The first is the will which is impregnable and which guards all the others. The force I have given it is free choice, which can open and close to whom it pleases and when it

wills. The other gates are the memory and the understanding. If the will yields and opens, there immediately enters the enemy which is self-love, with the other enemies that accompany it. The understanding receives darkness which combats the true light. The memory retains hatred, which is begotten from the remembrance of injury, and which destroys charity for the neighbor. It recalls the pleasures and joys of the worldly life as varied as the sins opposed to virtue. From the moment that those three gates have yielded, all the smaller gates of the senses are opened, and then harmony is destroyed.

Evil soils all the experiences and all the acts that come from them. We must then commence by watching attentively over the gates of our interior and exterior senses; for if the will does not rule them all with the energy of its free choice; they will revolt, and draw the will itself towards forbidden pleasures."

II

Now of those senses some call for particular attention; and, first the sense of sight. Among the senses this is without doubt one of the most noble. But to-day, as a result of the Fall, it is

the one through which our soul is most exposed. Indeed, the greater part of the dangerous images which come to us from exterior things have their source in this organ. Hence, the saying of Jeremias: "My eyes have wasted my soul." The eyes take in the images of exterior things that are hurtful to virtue and transmit them to the imagination. The imagination proposes them to us in an agreeable form, and this excites our desires and bad passions, to which often follow consent and a guilty conscience. Persuaded of this truth, Job had taken the firm resolution to watch attentively over his eyes. "I have made a compact with my eyes," he says, "never even to think of a girl." He should have said rather, one would think, never to look on a girl; "since the natural act of the eye is to look, not to think. But Job by expressing himself thus, would not have sufficiently made known the danger. To look and to think are two things intimately united. The look acts on the imagination. The imagination, troubled and agitated, provokes passion. Passion draws the will to evil. Hence we read in the *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena: "The eye causes and propagates death." And it does so "because it looks on a dead thing

with a guilty and dissolute look, and this look brings on levity and vanity of heart, and an indecent exterior, which causes death to him who looks, and also death to others." "Unhappy ones," continues our Lord, "you profane what I have given you in my bounty. You ought to look on the heavens and admire the mystery of my Providence; but instead of doing so, you see in them only matter and corruption; and you arrive only at death."

The danger of unguarded looks cannot be exaggerated. It manifests itself in the highest degree, it is true, when it concerns the angelic virtue of chastity. But this virtue is not the sole one exposed; and we can say that they all are, the moment the sense of sight is left unmortified. In fact it is by the sense of sight that the vices most often enter our souls. Gluttony, avarice, pride, anger, sloth, as well as luxury, have frequently for their sole source an imprudent look. If we add to the great variety of sins which we can thus commit, the rapidity and facility with which our looks escape the bridle of reason, we shall understand the necessity of showing ourselves very vigilant and very mortified on this point.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Active Purification of the Senses. (II)

I

After the sense of sight nothing is more important than the sense of hearing, which puts us in communication with God and with our neighbor by means of speech. While sight leads us to God by the spectacle of nature, it is by hearing that God pours the light of His doctrine into our souls. How in fact acquire, augment, and preserve in us the word of life, eternal wisdom, if we are not instructed, encouraged, and strengthened by the light of faith? The faculty which enables us to hear the Word which transmits to us good and holy thoughts, is then a very precious one, and we must take care never to dishonor or profane it. This is why we ought above all to seek truth and wisdom and close our ears to every lying and indecent word. A frivolous word, listened to with pleasure, can call forth violent temptations

and lead to a fall into the abyss. Thus, a soul truly concerned for her salvation and her perfection will avoid listening to frivolous, worldly, uncharitable, even flattering words; in a word, all that is not conformable to the law of God and to the holy maxims of the Gospel.

What we say here of the sense of hearing, regards also the tongue. The one and the other have need of being attentively watched over. In the *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena our Lord, joining these two important faculties, expressed Himself thus: "The ear also takes delight in listening to indelicate things, and in discourses on the neighbor whom one judges without examination as without justice. I have given man the tongue to confess his faults, to announce My truth, and to labor for the salvation of souls. He abuses it to blaspheme his Creator and to destroy his neighbor, whom he tears to pieces by lying calumny. He blames the good and praises the evil he sees done. He gives false testimony. He corrupts his own soul and those of others by lascivious words. His lips give out injuries which wound the heart like a sharp sword, and which provoke hatred and anger. Oh, how many homicides, impurities, angers, quarrels, loss of time, ha-

treds and evils of every kind, does not the tongue bring about?" We need say no more. To hear with pleasure a bad and reprehensible word, or to pronounce this word oneself, are two things evidently contrary to the most elementary rules of the Interior Life, and upon this point the mortification of the sense is indispensable.

II

1. The occasion does not permit me to treat of the active purification of the other exterior senses, all of which the truly zealous religious will mortify and guard with a scrupulous care, as becomes the wise virgin of Christ.

Let me go on to say some few words on the interior senses. We understand by the interior senses certain interior faculties of the soul destined to put us in communication with the exterior senses. These are four; common sense (*sensus communis*), the imagination, the judgment (called in philosophy *vis æstimativa*), and the memory; and these need to be purified even as the exterior senses. We shall speak only of two, the imagination and the sensitive memory.

The imagination is the faculty which re-

ceives from the *common sense* the images of things perceived by the exterior senses. It preserves them; it has the power of recreating them in the absence of the objects, and of forming for itself new representations by combining them. It is it that offers immediately to the sensitive appetite what is apt to move it.

The imagination, like all the other faculties, has been given to us to lead us to God; but as a consequence of the sin of our First Parents, it is become one of the greatest obstacles to our sanctification. All the disordered motions of our passions come from the imagination, which represents to us things, not as they are according to the light of reason and faith, but after certain false and lying appearances. The saints sometimes felt those wanderings of the imagination in the exercise of prayer, according to the saying of the Royal Prophet: "Cor meum dereliquit me"—"my heart hath forsaken me." St. Teresa often refers in her writings to those troublesome ramblings of the imagination, which she calls veritable traps or snares. And truly traps, and snares they are which catch the unwary mind and will, and lead them into evil thought and consent.

2. Lastly, the sensitive memory not only pre-

serves sensations and other sensible impressions, but it recognizes their anterior origin and refers them to the past.

The memory as well as the imagination can carry us to good or evil, according as it serves to preserve the remembrance of things good or bad. Too often the memory is the storehouse of all our irregularities. It recalls to us with an extreme vivacity the objects of our unruly passions; the transitory, useless, and often culpable things of this life; persons, conversations, perplexities, injuries; in a word, all that can trouble or agitate us, to the great detriment of our union with God and the peace of our soul.

3. These two interior senses, the imagination and the memory, we must mortify and chasten. And here, with St. John of the Cross, we might be permitted to treat only of the memory. For, indeed, the sensitive memory is confounded in practice with the imagination. Nevertheless, for greater clearness of explanation we will speak of them separately.

As to the purification of the imagination, authors make many recommendations, which we believe can be reduced to two important points: mortification and good direction.

A person mortifies his imagination when he removes from it useless and dangerous representations, whatever can turn him from the thought of God, or carry him to the pleasures of the senses, and alter the purity of the soul. Good direction of this faculty consists in representing to it useful and pious objects, capable of captivating it and turning it towards God and piety.

In order to mortify our memory and direct it towards good, two things are generally counselled; first, to remove and banish as much as possible the remembrance of useless and dangerous objects; and to let pass without notice every subject of inquietude by casting ourselves with confidence into the bosom of God. Secondly, to receive willingly, and to seek eagerly, all that can occupy and fill holily the treasury of the memory. This last part is very important and should be of daily practice in the commencement of the spiritual life; and to this end almost all the spiritual exercises tend. But to succeed, we must use discernment, order, method, application, and perseverance.

This purification of the memory procures us many notable advantages, and these we epitomize thus: In the first place, our soul en-

joys a greater tranquillity and a sweet and intimate peace. Secondly, we are delivered from worldly preoccupations, and from sins which are the consequences of them. Thirdly, we are sheltered from the suggestions and temptations of the devil who ordinarily employs images preserved in the memory to tempt us. Lastly, we are better disposed to receive the lights and motions of the Holy Ghost.

4. Let me conclude by saying that souls who aspire after perfection ought to apply themselves in a particular manner to purify their memory. The nature of the graces accorded to the soul in the state of union with God demands a purification as complete as possible of this faculty. We need not be astonished, therefore, that ascetic authors insist on this point whenever they treat of the preparation of the soul for contemplation. This exceptional purification of the memory is required, as I have already said, by reason of the sublimity of the end we propose to ourselves to attain, which is nothing else than a most intimate union with God by knowledge and love.

I have gone to some trouble in the treatment of this difficult subject of the purification of

our exterior and interior senses. This I have done because of my conviction of the little knowledge souls coming from the world ordinarily have of our delicately-balanced and complex nature, and because the purification of our faculties holds so important a place in the work of perfection.

Be not held back by reason of the arduousness of the task before you. It will in time become pleasant and easy, and its fruits will be commensurate with the care and energy you apply to it. God will bless your efforts. It will greatly strengthen you in the trying struggles of the spiritual life, and will enable you to gain many victories over the enemies of your salvation.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The Active Purification of the Soul. (I)

I. The Mind

1. To-day we come to the consideration of the last work to be undertaken by us in the purgative life or way—the active purification of our spiritual faculties, the mind and the will. And first, the mind. The active purification of the mind is an interior work by which the soul applies herself to remove as much as possible the obstacles which prevent the perfect submission of the mind to God. These obstacles are of three kinds; useless thoughts, ignorance, and, lastly, certain mental defects, such as vain curiosity, precipitancy, and obstinacy in judgment. The question as to how or why we are to combat useless thoughts, resolves itself into the question as to why or how we are to purify the intellectual memory; for in the purification of the mind there can be no question of the sensitive memory, the store-

house of the imagination. The intellectual memory, the storehouse of the intelligence, ought to be purified for the same motives and by the same means as the sensitive memory, concerning which I have already treated, that is, by repression and mortification on the one hand, and by good direction on the other; and for the same motives, for the greater part of the thoughts that ordinarily occupy our minds, when not decidedly vicious, are at most but intellectual rubbish.

As to the second obstacle, ignorance, it is not always willful, and consequently, not always a sin before God. But whatever be the cause, ignorance of divine things is very hurtful to our spiritual advancement. To dissipate it, we ought to have recourse to the light of faith and the teachings of the Church. Every soul that aspires to perfection seeks for truth with a holy eagerness; hears with joy the word of God; nourishes herself with pious reading, and allows herself to be directed in all circumstances with a holy simplicity and great docility in the way of salvation. "He that loveth me," says our Lord, "heareth my word."

2. We must in the third place, combat curiosity, precipitancy, and obstinacy in judgment.

And, first, curiosity. The desire of knowing is very legitimate in itself; but it can become bad when pride or levity are the motives of it. To leave the study of necessary things in order to occupy ourselves with vain and useless questions; to probe the secrets of God without motive, or by illicit means; to seek to know the truth without reference to its lawful end, which is God; to apply ourselves through vanity to things that are above us, and that surpass our power; these are all so many imprudent and often guilty acts which we ought to avoid if we would wish to walk securely in the way of salvation and of Christian perfection.

We must combat precipitancy. Precipitancy in judgment is an impetuous motion of the mind which makes us despise the rules of prudence and leads us to commit many faults. Precipitancy of mind has inconveniences as well as precipitancy in the movements of the body. When a person comes down precipitately the steps of a stairs, without passing by each intermediate step, he risks being thrown down headlong. In the soul, reason is on high, action is below; the intermediary steps are: the remembrance of things past, the knowledge of things present, the reasoning which compares; lastly,

docility which submits to the advice of the more wise. It is by all those steps, one after another, that we must descend regularly from reason to action, if we wish to act prudently. We ought, then, to avoid with care all precipitancy in our judgments and never decide anything without having maturely reflected, and without having weighed before God the pro and con of each thing in the balance of discretion. It is a counsel of prudence to sleep over a matter of importance and to seek light from the Holy Ghost before coming to a decision. It is the property of consideration to examine attentively the truth of things and to look at them in all their various aspects. Inconsideration, on the contrary, judges without reflection, neglects to observe the state of the question, and thus exposes itself to a false and erroneous judgment, a thing which is the cause of the greater part of our illusions, often even of our sins. Consideration is not a simple glance of the intellect, but an attentive, premeditated, profound gaze, as it happens to those who wish to render to themselves an account of the course of the stars. St. Bernard thus sums up all that can be said on the subject: "Consideration purifies the source itself whence it draws

its origin, I mean the mind; it governs the passions, directs the notions, corrects excesses, rules manners, and establishes good order and decorum in life. It gives a perfect knowledge of things human and divine. It puts in a good state what was in confusion, joins what was disunited, gathers what was dispersed. It penetrates to things hidden, seeks out those that are true, examines those that are plausible, and detects those that are feigned and disguised. It lays out what is to be done, considers with attention what is done, in order that there be nothing incorrect or reprehensible in the mind. Lastly, it in prosperity foresees afflictions and prepares for them, and in adversity gives strength so to conduct oneself as if he felt it not."

3. We must also combat obstinacy in judgment. Tenacity and obstinacy in the manner of seeing and comprehending things is also called stubbornness. This interior disposition is very hurtful to us in all respects. It prevents us from judging soundly, causes us to despise the advice of others, sometimes even of our superiors, and in some cases even diminishes purity of faith. Stubbornness can come from narrow-mindedness, or, rather, from a want

of discernment and prudence. Prudence has for its object to direct us in all the actions of our life. Now it is not possible that a man by himself can duly consider all questions concerning the good he ought to do and the evil he ought to avoid. This demands time and knowledge acquired by a long acquaintance with men and things. This is why in what concerns prudence we have need of being enlightened by others, and, principally, by the elderly, who have formed for themselves just ideas founded on experience. It is the mark of a docile mind and of good judgment to seek for counsels of wisdom. For, though a sound judgment be a natural gift, it can and ought to be perfected by attentive and continual exercise, and by the respect which one brings to gather up the teachings of the ancients without ever neglecting them through sloth or disdaining them through pride.

NINTH CONFERENCE

The Active Purification of the Soul. (II)

II. The Will

1. We now come to the last and most important stage of our interior purification,—that of the will.

The purification of the will is an interior labor by which we apply ourselves to destroy our own self-will in order to submit it to the will of God. This labor we undertake because there is nothing more opposed to salvation and perfection than self-will. If there is question of things evidently bad, there can be no doubt about it. In things indifferent, and even things good in appearance, we ought always to fear to displease God if we strive to do our own will, the continual source of defects and disorders of every kind. "He who lives only for himself," says Tauler, "does nothing for God. He has so high an opinion of himself that he has much difficulty to abandon it,—a thing which beyond all doubt can only come from

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the principle of pride; whence it happens, that he sometimes loses peace of conscience, and finds no taste for the good work he does; because he is not disposed for the reception of grace, and only chooses and desires, now one thing, now another. Sometimes he imagines that he is happy, but in truth he is conducted only by his own will, although he does not perceive it. For it scarcely ever happens that trouble rises up within us that it comes not from doing our own will; God has nothing so much in aversion as self-will." "Cease doing your own will," says St. Bernard, "and hell will no longer exist." As is easy to see from what I have said, self-will is nothing else but self-seeking; that is, a love of oneself more or less accentuated; a vice, or simply an imperfection according to the degree. Sometimes the soul that seeks herself goes so far as even to transgress a precept; sometimes she contents herself with not following a counsel. More often still, she renders imperfect or bad the interior disposition which accompanies an action otherwise lawful. We have, then, reason to affirm that nothing is more opposed to salvation and perfection than self-will and self-seeking.

2. Now there are two means given us to destroy self-will:—abnegation of ourselves and a true love of God. And first abnegation of ourselves. "Whoever you are," says Tauler, "commence with yourself, and renounce yourself first. For if you do not pluck out of your heart and cast far from you this self-love, whatever part you preserve for yourself, you will meet always agitation and obstacles. He who does not quit himself, loses himself, and he finds the less what he seeks; like in this to one who has lost the right way. What must be done to avoid this evil? We must come out of ourselves. 'If anyone will come after Me,' says our Lord, 'let him deny himself.' "

The second means by which we destroy self-will is a true love of God. The more we love God, the more we shall try to please Him. He who is occupied in annihilating his affection for self, in what he does as well as in what he omits to do, and even in what he suffers, so that he may give all his affection to God, is led to yield obedience rather than to exact it. Thus, the cause and the matter of all pride is destroyed in him. Humility receives its last consummation. God acquires all the power that He wishes to have over the man,

and the human will becomes so strictly united to the divine will that the man wishes and desires only what God wishes and desires. It is in this state that he puts off the old man and puts on the new, who is created according to the holy will of the Lord. Watch then over yourself with great care; and as soon as you remark in yourself the least self-seeking, renounce it without delay; because you will have so much the less pain in doing so, as you shall have been the more prompt in doing it and practised it the oftener. But when you exercise yourself in it, do it rather for the glory of God than for the love of this virtue.

3. St. John of the Cross insists on the necessity of purifying our will by the divine flames of charity. "In what concerns," he says, "the abnegation of the will and the active purification of it in order to establish oneself in this divine virtue of charity, I find no better word than this: 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength.' This passage contains all that an interior soul ought to do, and all that I have to teach her to lead her securely to the goal of union, of which charity is the bond. This commandment makes it a

strict and rigorous duty for her to employ all her faculties, all her actions, all her affections, and even all her tendencies to the service of God, in such sort that all her capacities and all her strength be applied to Him alone, according to that of the Psalmist: I will preserve all my strength for Thee" (LVIII, 10). The strength of the soul, as we have seen, resides in her passions and desires kept under the government of the will.

I have now treated of the active purification of the soul; that is, of the mind and will. You ask: "To what virtues do the acts of the purification of the soul pertain?" I answer: "Faith, hope, and charity are the virtues which establish and perfect the soul in its active purification." "Faith," says St. John of the Cross, "produces void and obscurity (that is, concerning earthly things) in the understanding; hope in the memory; charity in the will. . . . It concerns every soul that wishes to advance with sincerity in the interior life to lean upon these virtues. Without this she will never be perfectly disengaged from all created things. The soul in this life is united to God by nothing that the senses can give her; but she unites herself to Him in the understanding, by faith;

in the memory, by hope. This last virtue produces forgetfulness of all perishable and temporary things and gives to the soul the faculty of preserving herself entirely for the Sovereign Being, whom she hopes for. It can then refer to the memory although it resides in the will. Finally, the soul is united to God by love, which directly touches the will."

THIRD BOOK

The Illuminative Way

FIRST CONFERENCE

Grace

1. In entering on the study of the illuminative way the first subject that seems to demand treatment is divine grace. This way is pre-eminently a way of light and progress, which can be gone through only under the influence of the strong supernatural help that comes from God and can come only from Him. Of this our Lord assures us in the Gospel of St. John, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine; so, neither can you, unless you abide in me; for, without me you can do nothing." (John xv, 4.)

What is grace?

Taken in its most general acceptation, the word grace expresses above all the idea of gift, favor,—a benefit that is accorded not by

reason of an obligation of justice founded on right, but exclusively as an effect of the goodness and generosity of a benefactor. From this point of view we may say that all the natural advantages in the physical, moral, and intellectual order, such as muscular strength, virtue, capacity of mind, prosperity, etc., are gifts, although they respond to the exigencies of the human compound. They are benefits of God, as is nature itself and the existence which each one possesses without having any right to it, but simply by the pure liberality of the Creator.

Nevertheless, from the point of view that occupies us, those gifts that spring from the resources of nature, although under the command and the good pleasure of God, are not those that this word, grace, looks to. Grace, properly so called, in the Scriptural and theological sense of the word, is a peculiar gift. Its end is to purify, transform, and elevate the soul to the supernatural order, to sanctify her and to procure for her all the necessary helps so that she may elicit supernatural acts and attain the supernatural end for which God has destined her. We can then distinguish two aspects of grace, according as it has for effect to

impart to the will a special force in order to accomplish its supernatural task, or to perfect directly the soul herself by rendering her more like God and agreeable to His divine regards. They are not (and we must take particular note of this) two graces really distinct; for the former tends of itself to the attainment of the latter. The former indeed, designated under the name of actual grace, is only a motion which tends towards habitual or sanctifying grace,—a name reserved to the latter, which is truly grace *par excellence.*

2. And now as to the essential function of actual grace. Let me say that it implies essentially the idea of a divine motion, by which the will is made apt to produce supernatural acts. Now the will is susceptible of acting: (a) either through an attraction towards good which is presented to it, or from an end it wishes to attain; (b) or, and above all, in virtue of an interior impulse which, while respecting in all things liberty of choice, inclines the will to decide in favor of good and to accomplish it.

In the former case the good and the end which are exterior to the will exercise on it simply a *moral motion;* in the latter, the force

that inclines the will and makes it act, impresses on it a *physical motion.* This physical motion, coming from God, can be realized in two ways; according as the soul which profits by it is deprived of sanctifying grace; or, on the contrary, is possessed of it.

In the former case she (the soul) possesses indeed the aptitude for the supernatural, but does not possess the virtue of it. In order that she may elicit a supernatural act she requires the physical motion of actual grace, not only to incline the will and make it act, but also to carry with it this supernatural virtue and communicate it, at least in a transitory fashion, to the will, so that its act may be supernatural. It is this that takes place when God moves the will of the sinner so that he may make an act of penance or contrition.

In the second case, the soul already regenerated by sanctifying grace has not only the aptitude for the supernatural, but also the virtue of it. It is sufficient, then, that actual grace by its physical action apply this aptitude and this virtue to supernatural acts, in order that a supernatural effect may be produced. It is thus that God moves the will of the just to an act of charity.

Applying the data thus given, we may define actual grace as *a special supernatural motion which God exercises physically on the faculties of the soul, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, to enable her to perform supernatural acts in relation with the supreme end for which she is destined.*

This definition is sufficiently explained by the considerations that precede, and it consequently enables us to see in what circumstances we can act strictly by our own power, and those in which the divine help is absolutely necessary for us.

Thus, the infidel and the sinner, that is to say, those who are deprived of faith or of habitual grace, can, without the help of actual grace, perform naturally good acts. For a greater reason the believer and the just can do the same. Meanwhile, even for those acts that do not rise above the natural order, the ones and the others have need of the general concurrence of God, which practically always implies an idea of liberality and favor, as has been said above.

3. Nevertheless, without habitual grace, we, in the state in which original sin has left us, cannot victoriously resist all temptations, or

observe the whole natural law in a satisfying and constant fashion. It is certain in fact that an infirm and sickly nature cannot acquit itself of the task set before a nature strong and robust.

Without doubt, original sin has not destroyed the natural resources of the human soul. But it has deprived her of the supernatural and preternatural gifts, and this privation has had its repercussion in all the faculties of the soul. The intellect, seeing itself suddenly deprived of the lights of faith and infused knowledge, no longer finds itself as firm and sure as heretofore in the principles of reason and their application. The will, being turned away from God not only in as much as He is its supernatural end, but also in as much as He is the author and term of the natural order, preserves in itself tendencies opposed to God and to His law,—tendencies which inevitably carry it far from moral good, at least in certain circumstances, and engage it in the way of vice.

Thus, even with the habitual concurrence of the general motion of God, we can neither resist *all* temptations nor observe *entirely and in a constant fashion* the whole natural law

without a special help of grace. This is what made St. Paul say: "To will that which is good is present to me; but I find not in myself the resources necessary to accomplish it. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . I find then a law in my members fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin. Unhappy man that I am; who shall deliver me from the slavery to my mortal flesh? *The grace of God through the merits of Christ Jesus.*" (Rom. vii, 18–33.)

3. For a greater reason, then, it is evident that we cannot accomplish any supernatural act in the strict sense of the word without the help of grace. Let there be question of the first good motion that impels the soul in the supernatural way; let there be question of fidelity to the minor supernatural precepts, —from the moment that those acts come out from the habitual domain where the man can act normally with the sole general concurrence of God, a *special and supernatural help is required.*

The intellect must, from absolute necessity, be supernaturally enlightened in order that it may grasp the motives and the power of

such acts, and the will must be sustained and drawn by a supernatural force so as to accomplish the acts which the intellect, thus supernaturalized, proposes to it. This is the teaching that Christ gave to His disciples; "No one can come to me except the Father who sent me draw him"; and further on: "Without me you can do nothing," *i. e.,* for your salvation.

St. Paul expressed the same doctrine under another form: "What then, O Christian, distinguishes thee? for what hast thou that thou hast not received? and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received?"

For a more special reason still grace is necessary to assure final perseverance. The soul, being able to act in a supernatural fashion only under the motion of grace, can arrive at the term of its destiny only if the motor has given it power to continue its action to the end.

To conclude, then, it is in virtue of a special and supernatural grace of God that every man can habitually observe the natural law, resist all temptations, prepare himself efficaciously for the Christian life, live piously, and persevere unto death in this supernatural way that conducts to a happy eternity.

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Relations between Actual Grace and Free Will

I. The necessary intervention of grace in the supernatural economy and its powerful action on the will awaken at once in the mind a pressing question concerning the relations between the efficaciousness of grace and free will.

This problem, which has raised such heated controversies among theologians, is beset with the same difficulties that exist in the relations between God's omnipotence and human liberty, difficulties which become more grave by reason of the eternal destinies on which efficacious grace and the signal favor of final perseverance impinge.

Nevertheless, all discussion on this subject is of very limited utility from the practical point of view, and especially in the Christian conduct a true disciple of Christ ought to observe with the humility and confidence that befit his vocation.

The questions on grace have to deal with mystery, and if it is not prudent or wise to try to sound the truths that have relation to the interior life of God, since they infinitely surpass the capacity of our intellect, it is not less so to scrutinize the secret relations between the divine omnipotence and human liberty, which totally escape the researches of the human mind, and which revelation has not manifested to us.

Two things in the meantime are certain, and they ought to procure for the most exacting soul the most complete satisfaction and repose; first, God abandons no man on earth to his sad lot, but always gives him sufficient means for his sanctification and salvation; secondly, every man can and ought to exert himself to coöperate with the grace of God to render certain the supernatural action, which will conduct him to eternal happiness. This double conclusion follows clearly from those words of the Apostle: "God our Saviour will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Now this will would be derisory if God did not accord to all men the means of knowing the truths and of practising the virtues that are necessary to salvation. On the

other hand, St. Peter recommends to the first believers to watch with a jealous care over their conduct so that by their good works they may assure their vocation and election, giving them the guarantee that this vigilance will preserve them from every fault. (2 Pet. i, 10.) Every man has then sufficient guarantees of being able to arrive at eternal happiness.

2. If there is question of the infidel or the sinner, even the hardened one, the one and the other ought to find hope and comfort in those words of Ezechiel, speaking in the name of God Himself: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. xxxiii, 11), a sentence which St. Peter translates into a language still more touching, if that can be: "The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish but that all should return to penance." (2 Pet. iii, 9.) This is why St. Thomas, putting to himself the case of a poor unfortunate abandoned in savage regions, and who would have observed to the best of his ability the natural law as far as his limited intelligence permitted him to comprehend it, and

his will to put it in practice, replies: "It is absolutely certain that in this case God would charge Himself with the instruction of this man, either by the aid of interior illumination in all the truths necessary for salvation, or that He would send a special messenger to make them known to him, as He sent St. Peter to Cornelius."

But in the case of those who have received the benefits of faith and preserve the sweet persuasion of living in the grace of God, the confidence of their salvation is much firmer still, and rests most specially on the love that Christ testified to them. This thought is admirably expressed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: "What renders the love of God towards us infinitely precious and dear is that, when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us; much more therefore, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were his enemies, God forgave us and reconciled us with himself by the death of his Son; for a much stronger reason ought we to have confidence that after this reconcilation we shall be saved by the life of this same Son." (Rom. v, 8–10.) We must not forget, in read-

ing and meditating on these sublime words, that they are the fruit of divine inspiration. It is God Himself who pronounced them by the mouth of the Apostle, whose holy emotion is conveyed in the terms he employed. No created love is comparable with the infinite love that God has for men, and especially for those who have received the work of the Redemption. Enemies by reason of sin, God loved men and gave them as an infallible proof of His immense love His only Son, who received the mission of humbling Himself even to the level of men in order that He might suffer and die for them. Reconciled in the Blood of Christ, God cherishes them in a manner still more tender and paternal by giving them a superabundance of graces in view of the merits of the Crucified Redeemer to assure them by this means of the enjoyment of eternal happiness.

It is, then, with the sweetest piety and the most unshakable confidence that every Christian ought to repeat often those words of the Psalmist: "The Lord is my God and my saviour, He is my protector: I will not fear. In God is my salvation and my glory. He is the God who helps me and my hope is in him.

Hope in him, all you who are his people. Pour out your hearts before him: God is our protector forever. In thee, O Lord, have I hoped: let me never be confounded." (Ps. xxx, 1.)

"We ought to abandon ourselves to the divine goodness," remarks Bossuet, "not that we must not act and work, or that we are permitted to deliver ourselves against God's orders to carelessness or rash thoughts; but it is that in acting with our whole heart we must above all abandon ourselves to God alone for time and eternity."

My God! I abandon myself to Thee. I place in Thy hands my weak and unsteady liberty, and put all my confidence in Thee!

The proud man fears he shall render his salvation uncertain if he holds it not in his own hands; but he deceives himself. Can I be sure of myself? My God! I feel my will escape from me every moment, and if Thou wouldst render me the sole master of my lot, I would refuse a power so dangerous to my frailty.

Let none say, then, that this doctrine of grace and predestination drives good souls to despair. What! a person thinks to reassure me the more in leaving me to myself and delivering me to my inconstancy? No, my God! I

cannot consent to it. I can find assurance only in abandoning myself to Thee, and I find it the more, as those to whom Thou hast given this confidence of abandoning themselves entirely to Thee, receive in this sweet instinct the best sign one can have on earth of Thy bounty. Increase in me, then, this desire, and cause to enter by this means into my heart this blessed hope of finding myself in the end among that chosen number. "Heal me, and I shall be healed: convert me, and I shall be converted."

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Effects of Habitual Grace, and Its Relations with the Nature of the Soul

1. I purpose to treat to-day of the effects of sanctifying grace, and its relations with the nature of the soul.

Before doing so, however, let us recall its nature. It is, as I have said, a participation of the divine nature, by which we become the adopted children of God, the co-heirs of the glory of Christ, and temples of the Holy Ghost.

The fact of this participation and of its happy consequences is already established. "God," says St. Peter, "through our Lord Jesus Christ has bestowed on us very great and precious gifts as he had promised us, by which *we are made participators of the divine nature.*" On the other hand, St. Paul declares that God sent His Son that we might be made His adopted children. And elsewhere, he con-

cludes: "If we are children we are then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs of Jesus Christ." Finally, the great Apostle exclaims in addressing the Corinthians: "Know you not that you are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you?"

2. To understand in what this participation consists, it is important to conceive exactly the notion of "nature." Now, according to St. Thomas, the nature of a substantial being is that which in this being constitutes the first principle of the operations which are essentially proper to it.

Among the operations proper to God, and which can belong naturally only to Him, we must distinguish: (1) the immanent operation by which He knows Himself such as He is, infinitely worthy of being loved; (2) the creative operation, in as much as it draws the world out of nothing.

But the creative operation is a fact contingent and free, which might not have taken place, and which, hence, is *not* the essential operation of God, who, in as much as He is a sovereignly independent Spirit, ought to have a proper operation whose object and term are in Himself. For the rest, according to St.

Thomas, this operation, namely, the creative, is communicable to no creature.

On the contrary, the intimate and immanent operation by which God knows and loves Himself from all eternity, is truly the proper act *par excellence* of the divine nature.

In communicating to the soul His nature by means of sanctifying grace, God prepares man to know and love Him as He knows and loves Himself.

This is told us by St. Paul. "Now," he says, "we see God as it were in a glass, darkly; but then," *i. e.,* when we shall be flooded with His light, "we shall see Him face to face. Now, I know God only in part; but then, I shall know Him even as I am known" (or, as it is otherwise put; "as He knows Himself").

Sanctifying grace is then a participation of the Godhead formally considered as *nature;* that is to say, as the first principle of acts which are essentially proper to Him. It is a radiation which is made in us of all that is most high, most intimate, most profound, and most naturally incommunicable in the divine substance. Thus, whoever is in the state of grace, is exalted above all created nature, because no created nature has anything, either in its sub-

stantial basis, or in the faculties of which it is the subject and the root, that can lift it to, or render it worthy of, the Beatific Vision.

It is true that the time has not yet come for the contemplation of God face to face, and the joy that accompanies it. But we are already "the children," "the heirs" of God, not *in fact,* but *by right.* "If children, why, heirs also."

Now this double title of child and of heir establishes the immanent and permanent principle of operations which will one day be our heritage and glory: I mean, the created participation in the divine nature.

3. This leads us lastly to inquire: what are the relations of sanctifying grace with the nature of the soul?

Sanctifying grace not being a substantial essence, *i. e.,* a being subsisting by itself, is an accident, a quality which has need of a subject in which it adheres.

Without doubt this simple accident is something of the nature itself of God, and is consequently of infinite value; but it claims in order to subsist the substance itself of the soul, and its faculties which it purifies, transforms, and elevates by permitting them to comport themselves in a divine fashion.

First, grace penetrates into the inmost depths of the soul after the manner of light, which falls into the interior of a clear crystal; then it radiates through the virtues which proceed from it by each of the faculties, as the light diffuses itself and shines by all the facets of the crystal where it shines under colors the most varied and pure! Hence grace does not destroy nature, but deifies it and gives it a physiognomy which nature of itself does not possess.

Furthermore, grace, in thus penetrating the soul, adapts itself to its nature and to all the tendencies which are susceptible of good in whatever manner they may be disposed to produce it.

Grace, therefore, has, in some sort, the action of fire on a metallic seal, to which it gives a determined configuration and impress. Alone, when cold, the seal is incapable of impressing a distinct and durable image; but raised to a certain degree of temperature by the action of heat, it keeps its form and figure and can impress them on wax.

Thus grace exalts the energy of nature; but nature by its own power concurs with the supernatural act. This it does in such a way

that the same act is entirely produced by the two principles: by the natural principle as a vital act; for every supernatural act is human; by the supernatural principle as a deific act; for every supernatural act is equally divine.

More than that, there are not, properly speaking, two principles of action, nature and grace; there is only one: nature elevated by grace, or grace seconded by nature. It is that which theologians mean when they tell us that grace is in us as a second nature, which transforms our nature by leaving in it all that is good, and which comes equally from God as the author of nature.

Finally, grace rules and perfects nature, reconciles it with God, establishes with Him a sort of similitude, and causes it to act according to the divine views.

In the measure that grace purifies, transforms, and exalts nature, it acquires over it a dominion more and more absolute, to the end not only of emancipating it from the yoke of the passions and permitting free flight to all the resources at its disposal, but also of rendering possible to it the full use of all the treasures of the supernatural order.

The Master who impresses Himself on His

disciples, by the prestige of His knowledge and the eminence of His virtures exercises over them such an influence that He perfects them intellectually and morally, and thereby draws them to Himself and renders them like to Himself, and this to the degree that those whom He forms to His image think as He thinks, love what He loves, and strive to imitate Him in their whole conduct.

Thus, grace, laying hold on nature, turns the soul and its faculties towards their proper ends: that is to say, towards God, known and loved supernaturally, and makes us look upon all things and all events of this world in their relation with God and eternity.

In this fashion the Spirit of God so perfectly animates the regenerated soul that it can say in all truth with the Apostle: "I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me."

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Virtues

1. After having treated of grace, as the principle of the supernatural life, we go on to study the virtues, and especially the infused virtues, which sustain and perfect that life in us. In doing so we must first of all explain what are the virtues, for not all are conversant with their nature.

The virtues in general may be defined as good qualities or habits of the soul by which we live an upright and edifying life. They are divided into two grand categories—the acquired or human virtues, and the infused or supernatural virtues.

The acquired virtues are good habits which we form by the repetition of good acts. They are not born with us, but we have a natural aptitude to form them. They are, then, natural in their principle, since they are the work of man; natural in their motive, the good and the becoming; natural in their end, which is the

possession of God according to the powers of nature.

The acquired virtues are very useful in the spiritual life, for they serve to remove the obstacles that we meet in our vices and unruly tendencies, and they give a facility in the practice of supernatural goodness; but in order that we may find in them a greater help, we must supernaturalize their acts and practise them in view of God and our eternal salvation.

2. Here let me comment a moment on a vicious fallacy wide-spread in our days among those who are outside the Catholic Church. It is to rely on the practice of natural virtues for the attainment of eternal beatitude. They will say, for instance, "I practise the golden rule," meaning that they are just, kind, beneficent, that they lead a clean and upright life, are truthful and honorable; and as a reward they expect salvation. At the same time they have no supernatural rule of faith whatever. They accept or reject whatever articles of belief they choose. They believe or they deny the divinity of Christ, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the eternity of hell, the efficacy of prayer and supernatural works, self-denial, compunction for sin, etc. They do, or they leave undone,

whatever acts of worship they please, and live according to their own fancy.

What is all this but paganism under the guise of Christianity? Numbers of pagans practise all those virtues. They have a certain belief in the god of nature; many are remarkable for their love of truth, uprightness of life, kindness, sense of honor, and are good and faithful to their own. Many of the ancient philosophers believed in the same god of nature and made their lives conform to the same upright principles. But we are taught that all the virtues of paganism, the worship of God inspired by nature, all the natural virtues practised by men since the beginning of the world, could not procure for those who practised them one degree of the supernatural reward obtained by the little child who blesses himself, or who says the "Our Father," or by the heart-cry of the culprit who strikes his breast and cries: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." In fact, the purely natural virtues, whatever be their protection, are only shadows and ghosts in comparison with the supernatural ones. These are of an infinitely superior order and preëminently the work of God.

3. The infused or supernatural virtues are,

as their name implies, habits which God infuses into us together with sanctifying grace to render us capable of performing acts worthy of eternal life. They are also called Christian virtues, because they are inseparable from the grace of Jesus Christ, and because they make us live His life. In these virtues all is supernatural,—the principle, the motive, and the end. They come from God; they conduct us to Him. Meanwhile, although we cannot form the supernatural virtues in ourselves, we can dispose ourselves for them by our conduct, and merit their increase.

There are two sorts of infused virtues; the theological, or godlike virtues, faith, hope, and charity; and the moral virtues.

The theological virtues put us in immediate relation with God, our supernatural end. But this does not suffice. The Christian soul has need of being perfected by other infused virtues in that which concerns the means to arrive at this end. God of Himself imparts to us these virtues. They are: temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude, and those that are subsidiary to them. He furthermore puts the means in harmony with the end. We can, then, have two sorts of moral virtues, the ac-

quired moral virtues, and the infused ones. The latter differ from the former, not only in their origin, but also in their object and end. Their horizon is more vast and perfect, and their rule is not natural prudence or reason, but supernatural prudence; that is to say, reason enlightened by faith. The ones are natural: the others, supernatural, which effects that these two sorts of moral virtues are not of the same species; they coincide, indeed, as to their *matter,* but not as to their *formal object.*

4. All the virtues are nourished, strengthened, and augmented by their acts. There is, nevertheless, a difference between the increase of charity and the other infused virtues, and the increase of the acquired virtues. When there is question of the latter, the acts have a direct and physical generative influence; that is to say, they produce and intensify the virtues; whilst in regard to charity and the other infused virtues, God alone can produce them; He alone confers on them increase and perfection. Nevertheless, in this latter case the acts are far from being useless. For, according to the Council of Trent, every act of charity merits *de condigno,* that is to say, in very

deed, in virtue of a divine promise, an increase of this virtue. It is certain, then, that every virtue, even charity, is strengthened and increased by its acts.

It is indubitable that every act of an acquired virtue, equal or superior by its intensity and energy to the habit of this virtue, increases it, or, at least prepares for its increase. Indeed it is the same with the development of the virtues as it is with the development of living beings. Every aliment does not add to the growth of the latter immediately. We must, in order to arrive at this result, persevere in giving them nourishment. It is thus that by their repetition of acts the acquired virtues are increased. But when, by our negligence, the intensity of the acts does not correspond with the intensity of the acquired virtues, far from augmenting them, it contributes to their decline. It is in part the same with charity and the infused virtues that are united to it. According to St. Thomas and his school, every act of the virtue of charity and the virtues that are united to and dependent on it, merits an increase of charity; but this act is not always followed by an immediate increase, and if the act is weak and less in-

tense than the habit of charity, it operates solely by way of disposition.

The increase of charity resembles somewhat the increase of the acquired virtues, and we can compare the development of this virtue as well as of them to the development of living beings. Now plants and other living bodies do not increase by a continuous growth in such sort that if a living being has taken a certain development in a given time, it be necessary that it have grown proportionately during all the duration of the time. There is a time when nature prepares for the increase without actually realizing it; then it produces the effect that it had prepared by bringing about a real growth.

So also, charity is not increased immediately by each one of its acts. Nevertheless, each act prepares for its growth in this sense that it renders us better disposed to act by charity; and, furthermore, in the measure that this disposition increases, we produce more fervent acts of love, and thereby prepare an advance in this virtue.

For the rest, we must not forget that charity, *differing in this from the acquired virtues, cannot be diminished.* Inaction, however pro-

longed, leaves it in the same degree. For a greater reason tepid action knows no decrease of it, at least, directly. Nevertheless, this disposition of tepidity tends more or less to the loss of charity.

Many theologians hold that acts of charity, feeble or less intense than the habit, are instantly followed by a corresponding increase of the virtue. It enters not into our view to discuss the value of this opinion. Let it suffice to say that the contrary opinion, which is that of St. Thomas and his school, appears to us to excite more to acts of virtue, and that it cannot be in any case a source of discouragement, since these acts, although feeble and languishing, if they are repeated often at short intervals, sustain the virtue by preparing the increase, and are worthy of an eternal reward.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Theological Virtues

I

1. We shall to-day take up the study of the theological virtues and see what are their place and functions in the Christian and religious life.

The theological, that is to say, the godly, virtues are so called because they have God for their object and conduct us directly to Him as to our end. Faith leads us to believe divine revelation. Hope makes us desire God as our Sovereign Good. Charity is the love of God because of His infinite perfections.

God is truth itself: He can neither deceive nor be deceived. There is for us no greater certitude than that of revelation. To believe with firmness and submission of mind all that God has revealed and that the Church proposes to us on His part, is to have faith.

God, the bountiful, provides unceasingly for the spiritual and temporal wants of men. We ought to have recourse in a filial manner to

His protection, to live in peace and to expect of His infinite mercy not only eternal life, but also the graces we need in the trials and temptations of our terrestrial exile. It is thus we practise hope.

Finally, God is Goodness itself. He has made us to His own image and likeness. He has redeemed us at the price of His blood. He loads us every day with benefits. We must testify our gratitude and love to Him. Such is the office of charity which occupies the first rank among the virtues.

2. Faith is the foundation of the whole supernatural edifice. Without faith there is no hope; without hope there is no charity; without charity, no eternal salvation.

It is most important in the spiritual life to have a lively faith; for, the stronger the faith is in our hearts, the more closely we approach to God, and the more ardently do we love Him.

Hope is no less necessary than faith to arrive at salvation and perfection.

It is not sufficient for a devout soul to know that there is a Providence. We must also love its designs, which are often mysterious, submit to it with a filial submission, and expect the help of God with a firm, humble, and perse-

vering confidence. Without firmness, confidence will not resist trial. Without humility, confidence will be only presumption. Without perseverance, confidence will obtain nothing.

If our confidence in God is firm, humble, and persevering, God will be with us, and the measure of our confidence is in the certitude and firmness of our hope. If we wish to glorify God, to attain sanctity, to possess true happiness, we must submit ourselves with a firm hope and an unalterable confidence to the good pleasure of God.

3. Charity is an infused virtue by which we love God for His own sake and above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. The love of God and the love of the neighbor form only one sole virtue and one sole precept—charity. Let me develop my thought on this great subject of holy charity.

It is a love of friendship, of complacency, of benevolence. A love of friendship, because we love God for His own sake, and there is reciprocity in this love, for God loves us and has loved us first. Charity is also a love of *complacency* and *benevolence,* since in this sincere friendship the soul rejoices in the infinite perfections of God, and it desires for Him all

sorts of good things, that He be known, loved, served, and glorified forever.

Charity is not an imperfect love, an interested love, a love *of concupiscence,* as the theologians say; for by charity we love God principally on His own account and for His own sake. Furthermore, charity never ceases to be a *true* love, and as such it never ceases to be an inclination, a motion towards God, our Sovereign Good. As we shall see hereafter, this desire of possessing is inseparable from charity.

In charity there is also choice, that is to say, *predilection, preference.* It is a *sovereign* love, which loves God above all things, and all things for God and according to His will. It is equally an active love, a love of *conformity;* always to do the will of God; to submit and abandon oneself to His good pleasure in spite of sacrifices and repugnances,—this is the distinguishing characteristic of the true love of God.

II

1. I have said that charity occupies the first rank among the virtues. This preëminence of charity reposes on a triple foundation—its nature, its beneficent influence, and its sovereign

authority. On its nature: Charity is a love of friendship. It tends to union with God. It has for its principal object the sovereign goodness of God taken in Himself. It is superior to faith and hope; for those virtues do not unite us to God as perfectly as charity does. It is for a greater reason superior to the moral virtues, which of themselves do not put us in immediate relation with God. Charity is, then, of its nature the first of the virtues.

2. The beneficent influence of charity is not less incontestable, for it gives life and merit to all other virtues. "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor," says the Apostle, "and even if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

In order that a virtue be perfect, it must have relation to the final and universal Good; that is to say, to God, whose possession is to render us eternally happy. The virtue that tends to a true good, immediate and particular, is a true virtue, but an imperfect one as long as it is not directed by charity towards God, our last end. It is thus that we can say that there is no life and merit in the virtues without the influence of charity, which is the form, that

is to say, the determining element that animates them.

3. Finally, charity commands the other virtues as a sovereign. It puts them all in motion; and, meantime, it respects the sphere of action and the autonomy of each. It does not absorb them. It exercises a strong, powerful, and efficacious, but maternal government over them. The virtues remain as they were in regard to their particular end. Charity contents itself with conducting them to God, the last end of man.

"Charity by its nature," says Massoulié, "demands the union of all the virtues, as the quality of a queen requires the train of a queen; for the virtue that conducts to the last end, commands and puts in order all the other virtues, which are only the means to that end.

"Being then truly of the supernatural order charity looks as its proper object to the divine goodness and the glory of God which is the sovereign among all ends; it must govern all those agents which are subordinate to it and cause itself to be followed by all the virtues. It exalts them; it commands them; it perfects them; it imparts to them all their merit. The virtues, on the other hand, give a new lustre to

charity: They accompany it, they defend it, they increase its power."

"Charity," say the Fathers of the Church, "is the form, the soul, the life of all the virtues. It is the root and the trunk of the tree of life."

4. But in what conditions does this salutary influence of charity operate and render the acts of the other virtues meritorious for eternal life? Is it an *actual* influence? Is it necessary, for example, in order that an act of mortification become meritorious, that he who practises it say to himself at the same moment: "I wish to practise this penitence for the love of God?" Is it a *habitual* influence? Is the simple presence of charity in the soul sufficient to render all its acts meritorious? Is it a *virtual* influence? Is it necessary to offer from time to time one's good works for a motive of charity? The settlement of these questions we will leave to the theologians. Meanwhile we can definitely say that the *actual* influence is not necessary, that *virtual* influence, that is to say, that which takes its source in an anterior act of charity, is sufficient. We will not enter into more ample explanations on the subject here.

Suffice it to say that the opinion of those

who demand a *virtual* influence is conformable to the doctrine of St. Thomas.

It is useful, therefore, if indeed it is not necessary, in order to make our acts fruitful for eternal life, to make frequent offerings of our acts, words, and thoughts, to God from a motive of love, and for His greater honor and glory. This is moreover in conformity with the practice of the saints and of all pious Christians who were accustomed to raise their hearts to God frequently during the day and to make him the offering of all their thoughts, words, and deeds.

5. Let me conclude by saying that all the privileges of divine charity are grouped and reunited in the following passage from St. Francis de Sales: "The virtuous actions of the children of God all pertain to holy love; some, because itself produces them of its own nature; others, in as much as they are sanctified by its vital presence; and others, finally, by the authority and command it exercises over the other virtues which it causes to be generated. Among all the virtues the glory of our salvation and of our victory over hell is due to divine love, which as prince and general of the whole army of virtues performs all the exploits

by which we obtain the triumph. For holy love has its proper actions issued and come from itself by which it works miracles of arms over our enemies. Besides this it disposes, commands, and ordains the actions of other virtues, which for this reason are called acts commanded and ordained by love, and if, finally, certain virtues perform their operations under its command, provided that they carry out its intention, which is the honor of God, it ceases not to acknowledge them theirs; yet, for all that, we may say after the Apostle, that "charity suffers all, believes all, hopes all, bears all," and, in a word, it does all. And if we cease not to distribute the praise of the salvation of the blessed among the other virtues, because the acts of those virtues have appeared with lustre in those saints; yet always reciprocally, after we have extolled those particular virtues, we must refer all their honor to holy love, which gives to all the holiness that they have. For what else does the glorious Apostle wish to say in inculcating that "charity is benign, is patient, that it believes all, hopes all, bears all," if not that charity orders and commands patience to be patient, and hope to be hopeful, and faith to believe?

"It is true that with this he signifies, furthermore, that love is the source and the life of all the virtues; as if he wished to say that patience is not patient enough; or faith, believing enough; or hope, confident enough; or meekness, sweet enough; if love do not animate and vivify them; and it is the same that we are made to understand from this same "Vessel of Election," when he says that 'without charity, it profiteth him nothing, and he is nothing'; for it is as if he said that without love he is neither patient, nor meek, nor constant, nor faithful, nor hopeful, as it is becoming, in order to be a servant of God, who is the true and desirable end of man."

SIXTH CONFERENCE

How to Understand Approved Authors who Recommend us to Love God with a Pure Love, Without Self-Interest

I

1. It is not to be expected that one who has for his sole aim, as the author has in these conferences, the general study of subjects pertaining to the religious and interior life, can descend to a close-knit and ordered treatment of particular questions pertaining to that life. Passing over, therefore, many subjects of interest concerning the virtues, such as are to be found in the works of spiritual writers, let me come to-day to one of much practical importance, namely, how are we to understand approved authors who recommend us to love God with a pure love, without self-interest?

Those authors, in exciting to the practice of pure love of God, have never intended to exclude hope, a theological virtue indispensable to salvation. True love of God, in fact, cannot

be disinterested either in regard to eternal beatitude or to the means necessary to arrive at it.

There is a love of God, which is confounded in some sort with hope, and which is called love of concupiscence, because by it one serves God in view of eternal beatitude. This love is good and lawful; but it is not charity, which is a love of friendship, perfect love. When the authors of whom there is question here speak of disinterested love, they do not pretend to condemn a love less perfect but legitimate. For the rest, nothing prevents those two loves from concurring towards the same end,—the sanctification of our souls. On the one hand, we can love God with a disinterested love, solely for Himself, and dispose ourselves to show our love for Him without actually and explicitly thinking of the reward. On the other, seeing that God wishes to reward us, we are drawn to love Him from this motive also, and we can excite ourselves in view of this hope to love Him with more fervor, with a love of friendship and charity.

We must know that love of friendship, that is to say, disinterested, pure love, taken separately, is superior to a love of concupiscence, even as charity is superior to hope; but if the

love of concupiscence is founded on the love of friendship, it is no longer love of concupiscence,—it is pure love. In general, these two loves are inseparable; for it is difficult to love with a true love of concupiscence without feeling at least a commencement of the love of benevolence and friendship.

2. As to holy souls who love God with a love of concupiscence without having Him actually present to their mind as infinitely good and perfect in Himself, they have also the love of friendship, because this perfect love reigns virtually in them, and it is the end towards which their intention is always implicitly directed.

Nevertheless, this ought not to prevent truly pious souls from exciting themselves to the fervor of divine love by a more perfect motive. Still the motive of the love of concupiscence does not exclude the motive of the love of friendship.

On the other hand, the love of friendship does not exclude the love of concupiscence. On the contrary, it contains it *by eminence,* and is inseparable from it, for although the motive of beatitude is not actually and explicitly present to the mind, it is found in it virtually and implicitly.

We can indeed think of the infinite goodness of God, without thinking of this goodness in as far as it is communicated to us, and as it is beatifying. But this does not prevent our love from tending to God as He is in Himself, that is to say, as infinitely good and amiable, and as beatifying, which is a special subject of love. Those two motives are in reality inseparable on the side of God, for they represent the same indivisible thing.

The nature of goodness itself makes for the inseparability of those two loves, for it is of the essence of goodness to communicate itself. God is good, and it is for this reason that He communicates Himself in order to make us happy. We cannot represent to ourselves an infinite goodness without an outpouring and a communication of this goodness. If, by an impossibility, God were not our Sovereign Good, we could not find in Him a motive of loving Him. We can then admit a pure love, or a disinterested love, by abstracting for the moment from the motive of the love of concupiscence, without, however, excluding it. But this abstraction caused by the fervor of charity cannot last always. The variety in the motives

which we have of loving God can only be useful to us.

"The source of all errors in this matter," says Massoulié, one of the most learned and judicious of Dominican authors, "is to have separated in charity these two relations—the love of God as one's own good, and the love of God for His own sake." The Fathers of the Church, the Scholastic doctors, and the true mystics have never doubted that those two relations were inseparable in charity. But certain less enlightened mystics were wont to consider in charity the laws of friendship alone. "How," they said, "can we bring into accord two things so contrary? If love ought to look on God as one's own and sovereign good, without which man could find no reason for loving Him, how can he love Him (God) for His own particular sake? And if one loves Him for His own sake, what necessity of looking on Him and of loving Him in consideration of eternal beatitude?"

II

1. "It is not difficult to clear up this apparent contradiction. Man is called "every crea-

ture" ("Preach the Gospel to every creature") "because he has something in common with all creatures. He has life in common with plants; sensation, with animals; intelligence, with the angels. These perfections are united in his nature. They are not three determining elements of that nature, nor three different souls. One soul alone unites these three principles, which are divided in other beings. For the same reason, those three relations of love, of benevolence, and of friendship, are not three different virtues, but pertain to one sole virtue. Charity alone includes them all. It alone is the principle which produces their different acts, —*that of friendship,* the loving God on account of His own goodness; *that of benevolence,* the pouring out of itself in an infinity of desires to augment His glory, and to see it augmented by all creatures; and, finally, *that of love,* desiring the unceasing possession of this good in eternal beatitude."

2. Holy souls, leaving all these speculations to the theologians, constantly have a sensible experience of these three acts by the impression which charity makes in their hearts; and shutting themselves up, so to speak, in this marvellous circle of divine love they produce

by turns those different acts which sustain and strengthen one another without repugnance or opposition. Sometimes they look upon God as the Sovereign Good, whose possession will one day render them happy. They give up their heart to this secret inclination, which nature itself impresses on them, which grace makes perfect and renders every day more lively and vehement, which carries them to God as to the sole center where they can find repose. Sometimes, by a motion excited by grace, they contemplate the infinite greatness of God and His majesty, which lifts Him above all that can be imagined, and then they elicit a thousand acts of benevolence and rejoice that He alone possesses all those perfections. Finally, at other times, stopping solely at the consideration of His infinite goodness, which merits an infinite love, they elicit acts of a true and sincere friendship. They say to Him that, knowing Him as He is, they love Him and wish to love Him for all eternity, even were He to do them no good thing or to give them no reward, protesting that the sole happiness of loving Him takes the place of a sufficiently great reward with them. They even protest that they would wish to destroy and annihilate themselves

if their annihilation could add to His glory.

All these acts are excellent and in no way opposed to one another. They are the precious fruits of the Holy Ghost, and charity produces them all according to the different relations they consider in God. These acts, all different as they may be, belong to the same state, and one would deceive himself if he believed that a single act suffices to constitute a true state, or that in a state he can produce only a single act. A state, according to St. Thomas, is a permanent, and, so to speak, an immovable disposition. It is permanent principles which constitute an established state, not passing acts. Thus, all those principles that we have distinguished: love, benevolence, and friendship, belong to the state of perfection, and being united in charity, as the vegetable, the sensible, and the rational in man, they produce all these acts, now separately, now united, according as a soul has the more ardor, force, application.

The desire of beatitude is, then, inseparable from true charity, nay, it is a certain mark of perfection and of ardor of charity. At the highest degree of love the soul desires to be united to God and to enjoy Him as much as she is capable. It is then that she desires to be

delivered from the body and to be united with Jesus Christ. "In this degree," says Massoulié, "the soul is no longer but a flame which lifts itself ever on high; it aspires unceasingly after the possession of its sole Good. We can be assured without fear of being deceived that the disposition of which we speak is the most perfect and excellent of all."

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Practice of the Pure Love of God

1. Having come to a right apprehension of the teaching of approved authors who recommend to us to love God with a pure love, without self-interest, we shall go on to consider in what the practice of this pure love consists.

Pure love has for a practical consequence the act of abandonment; that is to say, the union of our will to the good pleasure of God. There are degrees in this love and in this abandonment, for every virtue has its beginning, its progress, and its perfection. The explanations we have given above will clear and explain the passages we shall cite on the practice of pure love and its different degrees.

According to Tauler, he who has charity willingly suffers for God all weariness and contradictions, and renounces all sorts of irregularities, never seeking himself either in temporal or in eternal things. The first are all sensible pleasures which attract our senses and

carry us to sin. We must die to all those things, and overcome our bad inclinations. He who loves Jesus Christ ought not to seek any temporal advantage in the spiritual exercises he practises, neither ought he to look for consolations, or sweetness, or interior relish, or the repose of heart which these procure. If this is permitted to those who are beginners and who are as yet imperfect, it ought not to be so with those who are more perfect. Pure love must seek nothing of all this; nor must it rest or put its confidence in it, for this would be to attach oneself more to the gifts of God than to God Himself, which is contrary to pure and perfect love.

It is of the essence of pure love to love God in desertions as in the time of grace. Without this it is manifest that one attaches himself more to the gifts of God than to God Himself. A truly pious man can indeed relish the gifts of God, desire spiritual consolation for himself and for others in as far as they can aid us in glorifying God and in obtaining beatitude, in rendering more easy the practice of virtue, and in conducting us more promptly and more surely towards God; for it is in this that His glory and our happiness consist. But

he ought to ascend still higher and not seek himself even in eternal goods, such as the glory and reward that God accords us for our good works in Heaven. He who loves God purely, and who has arrived at perfection, desires not those things on his own account, but he seeks in his affections and desires, in what he does and in what he renounces, only the pure glory of God, without looking forward to rewards or chastisements in the other life.

Beginners say to themselves: "I would not practise this mortification, this penance, if I did not hope to be rewarded for it." God permits this love to beginners, but he who has arrived at perfect love ought no longer to love in this manner. For the first commandment directs us to love God above all things, even ourselves.

2. St. Francis de Sales speaks not otherwise than Tauler. "Resignation," he says, "prefers the will of God to all things; but it ceases not to love many things outside of the will of God. Indifference is above resignation, for it loves nothing if not for the love of the will of God. What does it matter that the will of God is presented to me in tribulation or in consolation, since in the one and the other I neither

wish nor seek any other thing but the divine will, which seems so much the better as it has no other beauty in it than that of the most holy will of God. The indifferent heart is as a ball of wax in the hands of God, to receive alike all the impressions of the eternal good pleasure: a heart without choice equally disposed to all things, without any other object of its will than the will of God, which places not its love in the things that God wills, but in the will of God who wills them. Finally, the good pleasure of God is the sovereign object of the indifferent soul. Wherever it sees it, 'it runs after the odor of its ointments,' and seeks always the place where it is the more to be found without consideration of any other thing. It is led by the divine will as by a most amiable bond, and where *it* (the divine will) goes, the soul follows. It would love hell with the will of God more than Paradise without it."

3. A last citation will complete our exposition of the practice of pure love. "True love," says Father Piny, "renders us perfect in causing us to love God as He loves us; that is to say, purely, without interest and without return. A single word spoken with sincerity in all sorts of conjunctures, comprehends this

pure love in its entirety. It suffices to say '*fiat*' (let it be done!) in presence of the divine will. It is the most pure love that we can have for God, since it is to love His will at the expense of our own, to make His contentment ours, to find our satisfaction in being never satisfied when such is His good pleasure.

"True love has its commencement, its progress, and its perfection. In commencing we must establish ourselves by a loving and irrevocable gift of ourselves to the most holy and paternal will of God, and preserve and strengthen ourselves in this disposition by frequent acts of acceptation and acquiescence in the divine will in everything and everywhere by means of this repeated '*fiat.*'

"For those who are sufficiently advanced and strengthened so as to prefer without pain, or at least with promptitude and sincerity, the good pleasure of God to all their own interests, this love makes them feel a great interior peace in uttering this '*fiat*' in the midst of all the events of life. Finally, for those who have arrived among the number of the perfect, pure love consists in a forgetfulness, as continual as possible, of oneself, and in a remembrance, as continual and as loving as possible, of God

and of His good pleasure, in such sort that the perfect must no longer have in view only God and His good pleasure. It is thus that they begin to do on earth what they will do eternally in Heaven."

Such is the practice of pure love. It is, according to approved authors, a practice of abandonment to the will of God, a practice more or less perfect according to the grace received and the degree of fidelity corresponding to it.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The Different Degrees of Virtue

I

1. The treatment of the great theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity; or those which have God for their end, leads naturally to the treatment of those subsidiary virtues which have reference to the means to that end, *viz.*, the intellectual and moral virtues. This, however, I pass over to go on to the treatment of other questions, in as much as the matter of those virtues pertains in good part to the domains of moral and dogmatic theology.

But before doing so, it is important to explain an excellent doctrine of St. Thomas, which teaches us to discern the different degrees of virtue and the various ways of practising it. For we must not suppose that there are certain virtues for those souls who are beginning to walk in the ways of sanctity, and others for those who are already far advanced.

The different way of practising them is the only real distinction of their state or degree.

2. Philosophers distinguish four degrees of virtue, differing from one another in dignity, and comprehending the cardinal virtues, and those that flow from, and are subsidiary to, them. They place in the first class the civil and ordinary virtues which regulate the actions of the daily life of man; in the second class, the virtues that purify the soul; in the third, the virtues of a soul already purified; and in the last, those virtues that are practised in an exemplary degree. Of these, the last only can be applied to God, and according to our way of appraising, they form the sanctity of God; the other degrees belong to the sanctity which may be acquired by creatures.

Passing over the exemplary virtues which pertain to God alone, since He practises them with absolute perfection, and they constitute His sanctity, let us devote ourselves to the study of the other three degrees of the virtues, or the three different ways of practising them.

A soul may be considered in one of three different states; namely, in the common and ordinary state in which all men are, and in

which they practise those virtues called by the ancients *political and civil,* because they fit a man for the commerce of the world. This is the first stage in which all Christians ought to be found, even if they choose to live only according to that reason which is common to all mankind, and do not wish to fall into continual errors.

But after the soul has made some progress in the exercise of those common and ordinary virtues, she begins to practise them in a more perfect way, and they are then called *purgative virtues,* because they purify the soul, produce more perfect acts, and begin to detach the soul from those vain and frivolous objects which till then had captivated the senses. They cleanse her from the smallest stains and the slightest attachments. They give her a distaste for the occupations of the active life and the conversation of the world, and thus disposing her for union with God, make her sigh after the repose of contemplation.

Lastly, the highest degree to which the soul can attain in this life is that in which she has acquired the virtues called *"of a purified heart."* She then sets aside the occupations of social and ordinary life; banishes from her

mind and heart everything that can remind her of earth; gives herself entirely to God; possesses Him in the repose of contemplation; and at last that happy soul whose fidelity God has blessed by giving her a foretaste here below of the bliss she hopes for hereafter, sees and loves God alone in all the creatures of the universe. This is the highest degree of virtue.

3. The better to understand this doctrine of St. Thomas, which is the foundation of the spiritual life, it is useful to speak in detail of each degree and to explain the duties of the four cardinal virtues and the acts we make in the three different degrees, in order that we may know to what a degree of perfection a soul can rise with the help of grace.

In the first degree we consider the virtues only in so far as they are common to Christians. The true office of prudence is to regulate all our actions, all our desires, and even all our thoughts by reason alone, and it should never allow the will to form any resolution contrary to virtue. The office of fortitude is to render the soul superior to every danger, and to make her incapable of any fear except the fear of sin. This virtue should make us receive with great equanimity all the accidents by which

Providence is wont to try mankind; adversity without being cast down, and prosperity without being puffed up.

The office of temperance is, not to allow man any pleasure of which he may afterwards repent, and to keep the desires of the inferior appetites under the continual sway of reason. Lastly, the office of justice is to maintain universal equality and give each one his due. This is the lowest degree of virtue that can be fixed. The acts done in it are the most ordinary of all, and such as one cannot neglect without forfeiting his claim of being a decent man or a Christian.

The philosophers teach us that reason, not public opinion or passion, ought to be the rule of our actions; and this, as St. Thomas explains, because God has given us reason as an expression and a participation of the eternal law in order to make us avoid vice and embrace virtue.

This is so true that, according to St. Augustine, among the three different elements of good,—the useful, the agreeable, and the pure; or, in other words, interest, pleasure, and virtue,—we are not allowed to act from any but virtuous motives, and if reason does not com-

mand it, we should never allow ourselves to be drawn by interest, not even if it would gain for us an empire; nor by pleasure, even if it only consisted in looking at a flower.

II

1. But we must not allow ourselves to rest in the practice of the first degree of virtue, which takes reason for its guide and is, to speak properly, but the practice of pagan morality. We as Christians should endeavor to draw as near to God as we can. It is a law laid down by Jesus Christ, who commands us to "be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect." Those heroic souls who endeavor to become like God, who avoid the slightest stains, and who, being completely detached from all human things, think only of what is divine, and converse only with Heaven, rise to the second degree. Here virtue has a nobler exercise and gives rise to more perfect acts. To speak of the cardinal virtues alone (and all other moral virtues are subsidiary to them), prudence causes the soul to despise this visible world and all it contains, by an ardent desire of contemplating heavenly things. Temperance makes her renounce everything that regards the use of

the senses, as far as human weakness will allow. Fortitude gives her firmness enough not to fear that which is most dreadful, namely, death. Lastly, justice unites all the powers of the soul and makes them join in a firm resolution of never abandoning the practice of virtue or of falling below the degree to which she has risen.

It is at this stage that the virtues begin to look like Christian virtues. The highest point to which nature, philosophy, and the morality of the ancients were able to rise, was that of living according to the dictates of reason. And yet the most perfect degree of pagan philosophy must be inferior to that point at which Christian virtue begins, enlightened and purified as it is by religion and faith. He who seeks only his own interest or what may be useful to himself, leads the life of a plant. He who follows only the inclinations of nature and the impulses of those passions which lead him to sensual pleasures, leads the life of an animal. He who, rising above interest and passion, lives and considers only the beauty, pleasure, and happiness he finds in virtue, leads the life of a philosopher; but there is not as yet in his conduct anything Christian. Man must, therefore, rise above reason, and by a motive of charity

refer all his acts to God, the possession of whom can alone make him happy; then only does he begin to lead the life of a Christian.

2. It is true that man has in him nothing greater than his reason; for it brings him near to the angels. But man was not created to live according to reason alone: for he would then live only as a man; and man ought to live according to God. Therefore, in order to arrive at that perfect happiness which is above nature, reason should not be content with its own light; it should rise above itself, take the light of faith, act only from a motive of divine love, and refer all to God.

It is this motive of a supernatural end to which we refer our actions that distinguishes the Christian virtues from those that are simply moral or philosophical.

The wise among the pagans have, it is true, left us excellent rules for living well, among which it suffices to cite a few; as when they tell us that we should oppose reason to passion, prefer honor to utility, and virtue to pleasure. But we who have received greater light and are called to a more elevated degree of happiness, should measure virtue only by the proportion it bears to the greatness of future

things, and esteem only that as useful which can contribute to the acquisition of eternal felicity; because acting not only as philosophers, but also as Christians, we should not confine ourselves to the impulses of nature, or to the sole light of reason; but, raising ourselves above these, we should refer everything to a supernatural end, and act only in view of that eternal beatitude which we know by faith, expect by hope, and deserve by charity. Hence all the Holy Fathers reckon as sins those actions which, not being vivified by charity, are useless and fruitless, and, according to the maxim of St. Thomas, "we call sin every action which is imperfect for want of some perfection or necessary circumstance. There is a great difference," he says, "between the virtues to which philosophers have given that name, and those which theologians by the light of faith have recognized as peculiar to the religion of Jesus Christ."

Faith teaches us that we were created for a supernatural end and that we must merit that end with the help of grace. All our actions must, therefore, tend to this Sovereign Good, and all those virtues that are not elevated by grace and charity are barren, and mere ghosts

of virtues. He alone is a true Christian who by supernatural prudence not only prefers what is just to what is useful and agreeable, like the philosophers; but who despises this miserable world and all its greatness out of a desire of possessing God. He is a true Christian who, not falling into any excess, and avoiding all forbidden or superfluous pleasures which reason itself obliges us to avoid, "makes use of visible things only out of necessity and to sustain nature," which is the practice of Christian temperance. I call him a Christian who receives adversity, prosperity, and the other vicissitudes of life with a tranquil mind, and who, moreover, animated with truly Christian fortitude, despises death and looks upon it only as a passage to eternal felicity.

Lastly, a true Christian gives to everyone his due, which is the lowest degree of justice. But above all its other duties, Christian justice gathers together all the powers of the soul,—the mind, the heart, and the will,—in order to unite itself to God and to preserve that union inviolable.

Let me here remark that there are a great many Christians, if we consider merely the name, the profession, and the common practice

and external works of religion; but how few there are when we come to consider the actions which ought to result from the sanctity of that vocation!

3. However elevated this second degree of virtue may be, there is a third and still higher degree, which is attained by those God-like souls who are completely transformed in God as far as a pure creature is able to be in this world. Souls in this state possess those virtues which we have called *"the virtues of a purified heart."* They practise in a nobler and more heroic degree those virtues of which we have already spoken.

In this degree, to speak once more of the cardinal virtues, prudence is, not merely to prefer what is heavenly to what is earthly, and to look upon nature as nothing in the sight of God, but also to love and desire God alone in all things, as if He alone existed. The office of temperance is, not merely to repress those desires which are unworthy of a Christian soul and degrade it to earthly gratifications and sensual pleasures, but to efface all recollection of them so completely from the soul that it does not retain the slightest idea of them. The office of fortitude consists, not merely in en-

deavoring to vanquish the passions and irregular impulses of corrupt nature, but in reducing them to such absolute submission that they are no longer felt and can no longer corrupt the heart, so that the soul is free from any desire whatever. Justice keeps an equal balance in everything, and gives to each one his due, and besides that keeps the soul united to God by an indissoluble tie, which it is firmly resolved never to break.

Such is the height of sanctity to which grace can raise the soul. A complete conversion is effected. The soul becomes all ardor for heavenly things, and insensible to all the things of this world. She receives the most perfect likeness to God which is possible in this life. She is raised so high above the passions that it seems impossible they can touch her. She has forgotten everything on earth and can only know, love, and desire divine things, being completely transformed into God, and following the impulses and movements of God in all things.

NINTH CONFERENCE

The Practice of the Presence of God. (I)

"I am the almighty God! Walk before me and be perfect." (Gen. xvii, 1.)

I

1. Thus God of old spoke to Abraham, and His words contain a mighty truth: it is that if we walk before Him we shall lead perfect lives.

But what is it to walk before God? It is to cultivate an abiding sense of His presence. It is to realize and to be conscious always that He is everywhere, that He sees and knows all things, and that there is no escape from His all-seeing eye.

That God is everywhere is a truth known to all, and it comes from the attribute of His immensity. He is everywhere, as theology teaches, by His essence, and by His power, and by His presence. By His essence: that is to say, His Supreme Being contains all things. He is

present by His power. He made all things; He upholds all things; He gives motion to life and all things. He is everywhere by His presence. He sees and knows all things, and nothing can be hidden from Him. He pierces the depths of hearts. He knows perfectly all that passes in the interior of rational creatures. In a word, the present, the past, and the future are known to Him; and there is no circumstance of time or place which can be hidden from Him. These are so many incontrovertible truths which Scripture teaches in a great number of places. The Apostle comprises all that can be said on the subject in that famous speech addressed to the Athenians: "God, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served with men's hands, as though he needeth anything, seeing it is he who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. . . . Neither is he far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts xvii, 24–28.)

2. Now it is of this presence that I want to speak to you, and it consists in believing, and in preserving an abiding consciousness that God knows all that we do, that He hears all that we say, that He beholds clearly all our thoughts

and intentions, that we are entirely in His keeping, and that nothing whatever that happens to us or passes in our soul is hidden from Him. This sense of God's presence was the delightful and abiding exercise of the saints, and it was the source and the secret of their sanctity. All Scripture as well as the lives and writings of the saints testify to this. Some, as St. Agnes of Montepulciano, were so impressed with the sense of God's beauty and goodness as exhibited in the smallest leaf or flower, that the sight of it threw them into ecstasy. Others, as a St. Francis de Sales, a St. Francis of Assisi, a St. Dominic, were so impressed with God's presence everywhere that they conducted themselves always as if they were in the sanctuary and before God's throne. This was but in accordance with the recommendation of the great Apostle: "Let your modesty be known to all men: the Lord is nigh." But none among the saints seems to have carried the exercise of the presence of God in all his works to greater perfection than did David, as is seen in many passages of the psalms: "I set the Lord always in my sight." "Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened; seek

his face always." "He is the searcher of the reins and the heart. . . ." "Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight, but all things are naked and open to his eyes." And that great psalm, the 138th, "Domine, probasti me," etc., is it not one continuous laudation of God's presence everywhere, and of His intimate knowledge of all things? "Lord, Thou hast proved me and known me. Thou hast known my sitting down and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off. My path and my line thou hast searched out. Thou hast foreseen all my ways, . . . Behold, O Lord, Thou hast known all things, the last and those of old. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me, and I cannot reach to it. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. And I said, perhaps darkness shall cover me, and night shall be light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night

shall be light as the day. The darkness and the light thereof are alike to thee." (Ps. 138, 1–12.)

II

1. The cultivation of the sense of God's presence procures us several great advantages, and these I want to point out to you. It turns us away from evil. It animates us to the practice of good works. It sustains us in the labors and combats of this life. It consoles us in our sufferings and afflictions. Let me point out to you one of those advantages to-day. I say: it turns us away from evil.

If the presence of a mortal man is capable of staying us, and of turning us away from the commission of an evil act, how will not God's presence stay us, if we only think of it? Who could resolve to violate a law which obliges under a life penalty before a judge who has the power to condemn the guilty and to inflict the penalty which they deserve? Is there anyone, however lascivious he may be, who would have the effrontery to give himself up to a shameful crime, to a foul impurity, in the presence, I do not say, of a person of consideration,

but even of a child who would have come to the use of reason; of the last of men? What do not people do on the contrary to hide themselves and to conceal the knowledge of their infamous actions from the eyes of the world? They shut themselves up with care. They seek out secret places. They avail themselves of the darkness of the night. Now I ask you, if a man thought seriously when he was on the point of doing a bad action (of saying a bad word; of uttering an oath, a blasphemy, an obscene discourse; of committing an injustice, an impurity), would he determine to take the step if he thought well, and if he was persuaded that he was under the very eyes of God, and that God had the power to punish him, "not as men, who can only kill the body, but that He can cast both body and soul into hell?" No, there is none in the world who would not be arrested by this thought if he was entirely and perfectly penetrated with it. And thus it is true to say that the remembrance of God's presence would infallibly prevent us from doing evil if our soul was well filled with it; and we abandon ourselves to crime only because we forget this adorable presence.

Your own experience will leave you in no doubt about it. Is it not true that every time you have had the misfortune of yielding to your passions, of rendering yourselves guilty of any sin, you commenced by putting aside the remembrance of God? You said, at least you showed by your miserable conduct that you were in that sentiment,—you said, as those impious ones of whom it is spoken in Scripture: "The Lord will not see what I do, neither shall the God of Jacob know my disorders."

Ought you not then reply to yourself what was replied to those criminals: "Understand, ye insensate among the people, and ye fools, be wise at last. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? Or he that formed the eye, doth he not consider?" He who is the source and principle of all knowledge, will He not know what you are about to do?

2. Ah, if you had those thoughts, if you had made those salutary reflections, you would have stopped on the brink of the precipice, and you would not have thrown yourself over, as you did, to your grief, perhaps, many a time.

Remember God's presence always and everywhere. Like holy David, "set the Lord always in your sight." This continuous sense of God's

mighty presence will impress you with the seriousness of life, with the importance of doing all your actions for God, and will act as a powerful deterrent to preserve you from sin.

TENTH CONFERENCE

The Practice of the Presence of God. (II)

"I set the Lord always in my sight; for He is always at my right hand that I be not moved. Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced; moreover, and my flesh also shall rest in hope." (Ps. xv, 8–9.)

I

1. These words, taken from the fifteenth psalm, are, according to the interpretation of the Apostles, Saints Peter and Paul, a prayer and a prophecy of the Resurrection of our Lord from the tomb. And they refer to the consciousness of His Sacred Humanity in the power and the will of His Godhead to effect this great wonder. Therefore, it is added: "For he is always at my right hand that I be not moved." This consciousness gave Christ power and courage to bear the humiliations and sufferings of His Passion. "For this reason," He

says, "my heart hath been glad, and not only that, but this interior joy hath inspired my tongue to pour itself out in songs of triumph and thanksgiving; nay, my very flesh, my dead body will repose in hope that it will not fall into corruption in the grave, but that united once again to the soul, it will participate in the glory and triumph of the Resurrection."

In these words the psalmist would also intimate to us that the soul of the Saviour, though it had an intuitive vision of the Godhead by reason of the Hypostatic Union, still desired more and more to penetrate into the depths of the divinity, and that this vision and knowledge will be its everlasting beatitude in Heaven.

But the words have also an accommodated meaning, and in this they would point to the joy of heart and the constant and unfailing strength and the other advantages coming from the practice of the presence of God: "I set the Lord always in my sight; for he is always at my right hand to help, so that I may not fail. Therefore my heart hath been filled with gladness; so much so that my tongue pours forth unceasingly songs of joy and thanksgiving; moreover, my flesh, that is to say, my whole

inferior nature, participates in the elation of my soul and is filled with courage to do its part in the battle of life and in the service of its God."

2. It is of the holy exercise of the presence of God that I wish to speak to you once again to-day. In my last discourse I told you how this practice withdraws us from the commission of sin. Let me show you now how it also procures us other advantages.

First, it impels us to the practice of virtue. What more capable of inducing us to the practice of good works than to consider seriously that we are always in the divine presence, and that the Lord observes and examines everything we do? A son who is under the eyes of his father, from whom he expects a rich inheritance, but who is promised it only on condition of his revering and obeying him, will he not exert himself to fulfill his duty of piety towards him and satisfy all his wishes? Will not a servant who knows that his master observes everything that he does, take care not to waste his time?

We are the children of the Heavenly Father. He has shown an inconceivable love and tenderness for us. He has promised us an eternal

heritage, and, by consequence, one of inestimable value, but only on condition that we acquit ourselves faithfully of His commands and do His bidding. Shall we not then love and serve Him faithfully in return and do His holy will?

We are the servants of the Sovereign Master; the laborers whom He has sent into His vineyard. The reward consists not in some transient and perishable goods, but in immense treasures, in a kingdom that shall never end; but we shall receive it only on condition that we shall have well employed the time of our life. Shall we not then obey cheerfully our good and kind Master and bear patiently the fatigues and the heat of the day?

But reflect a little and see what the doing of their actions in public and before the eyes of men, what the desire of being regarded and esteemed, causes the greater part of men to do. They count as nothing the most difficult and exhaustive labors in order that they may gain the ends they seek, even though those ends be worthless and vain.

Why, then, our indolence in striving for virtue? To please miserable mortals and to gain their esteem and applause, men will put

forth the greatest efforts and make the most generous sacrifices. And the remembrance of God's presence, the consciousness that we do all our actions and live our life under His all-seeing eye, will it not be capable of overcoming our languor and our sloth? No, the cause of it is that we pay no attention to the mighty presence of God, who is always near us and observes everything we do. We comport ourselves as if He were far away from us, as if He saw or heeded us not, and we forget Him all the time.

3. I need scarcely tell you how the exercise of God's presence sustains us in the combats of life and consoles us in our sufferings and sorrows. With what courage does not a soldier fight in the presence of his general, especially when he sees that general himself go bravely into the thick of the fight and strive manfully, even though covered with wounds and bleeding at every pore? Jesus Christ Himself is our general. He goes before us in the practice of every virtue and in the overcoming of every foe. Shall we not follow Him on the road to victory, especially as He is ever present to succor our weakness; or, as He says, since "He is always at our right hand, that we be not

moved"? It was this thought of God's abiding presence to succor us in our trials, and at the same time the holy example of our Lord, that sustained the saints in the practice of heroic virtue and in overcoming every obstacle to their salvation. See the illustrious example of this in the person of St. Stephen, the first of the great heroes of Christianity. Overwhelmed with a hail of cobblestones, he lifted his eyes to Heaven and he saw Jesus Christ standing there. The sight of his Divine Master, present to succor him and to crown him with victory, and at the same time the remembrance of the prayer for forgiveness of His enemies breathed by the Saviour on the cross, filled him with fervor and strength. So with a heroic effort he rose upon his knees and prayed for his enemies. He asked with instance that his death be not imputed to them, and in these sentiments yielded up his soul to God.

4. A final advantage that we draw from the thought of the presence of God, is consolation in our miseries, afflictions, and sufferings. When a sick person sees his physician before him, it seems to him that he is much relieved. If in our maladies and infirmities, if in poverty and the loss of goods, in interior desolation and

in all grievous accidents that happen to us, we remember that God, the Sovereign Physician of our souls, is near us to sustain and console us; that He is about to crown our patience, and to pour us torrents of delight for all eternity in return for the few drops of bitterness which we suffer here below,—shall we not suffer with joy? Will not murmurs and complaints be changed into thanksgiving? And shall we not desire to suffer still more in order to augment our glory hereafter? This great God assures us by His prophet that He is with us in tribulation in order to deliver us and glorify us.

"I set the Lord always in my sight; for He is always at my right hand, that I be not moved. Therefore, my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced; moreover, and my flesh also shall rest in hope."

II

And now let me give you some directions in the practice of this holy exercise, as suggested by the saints, and especially by those great mystics, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

Represent God then as always present to

you and the observer of all your actions—now as a King full of majesty, seated upon a throne of glory and surrounded by an innumerable number of celestial spirits—now as a Judge, armed with all the thunders of justice to punish the evil acts of His enemies—now as a good Father who watches over you and who has an abiding interest in your affairs—now as a Spouse who caresses you, and who pours out on you all the riches of His love, and who "takes up His dwelling-place in your heart." And as to your own soul, consider it as a noble and spacious temple, in which should resound at all times hymns, and praises, and thanksgivings to God who fills it with the majesty of His presence; or as a palace in which He dwells, and where He commands as from His own high throne; or as an enclosed and delightful garden to which the Spouse comes when it pleases Him to take His repose, and in which He will cultivate for His use and pleasure the flowers and fruits of a virtuous life; or as a wilderness to which you will retire from the confusion and bustle of the world to taste the delights of God's companionship, to join Him in prayer and holy conversation.

Conceive your Jesus, the Man-God, your

Lord and Spouse, as in the stable at Bethlehem; in the arms of His Mother; amid the doctors in the Temple; in the home of Nazareth; working miracles for the alleviation of the sufferings of His people; at prayer on the mountain top, or in the garden of Gethsemani, or on the Cross; amid the scenes of His Passion, or the glories of His risen life; or, finally, as the King of Glory, receiving the everlasting praises of the angels and saints. Accompany Him, I say, amid the scenes of His private, and public, and suffering, and risen life, and in the glory of eternity.

Accustom yourself to see God always and everywhere, and all nature as an open book will make known to you the majesty of His divine presence, and your heart will exult and you will sing to Him in the words of the devout soul:

"I see Thee in the morning light
That gently steals o'er hill and vale;
I hear Thee in the rippling brook
That flows unceasing through the dale;
Within the breeze I hear Thy voice
That gently speaks of love to me,
And from my inmost heart I say:
How beautiful our God must be!

"I see Thee in the Spring's first hour,
In Summer's quiet, happy days;
In Autumn's golden harvest time,
In Winter's stretch of snow-clad ways.
I see Thy power everywhere;
In wooded grove, in busy mart;
And in my soul I humbly say:
O God, how wonderful Thou art!

"All nature speaks of Thee to me,
The sunlit morn, the beauteous day;
The starry night, the calm, the storm,
Thy loving attributes portray.
All that I am cries out to Thee,
I long to feel Thy fond embrace.
If such Thy glory be when veiled,
What will it be when face to face?"

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Illuminations of the Holy Ghost

I

1. We come to-day to study a matter of considerable importance in the spiritual life. It is, what are we to think of the interior motions commonly designated as "illuminations," or "lights of the Holy Ghost"?

Daily experience proves that everyone is subject in the most intimate depths of his being to two influences whose tendencies are contrary to each other, and which exercise upon him the most opposite inclinations. St. Paul speaks very clearly of this duality of attractions which he felt in his soul, and which was for him a source of torments. It is the flesh and the spirit: "I find a law in my members contradicting the law of my mind."

Our nature, double in its elements, appeals to two sorts of objects, of which the ones respond to its sensible well-being; the others, to the joys of the spirit. But the soul and the body

are joined so intimately that the body has life only by the soul, and the soul is subject to the influences of the body in its most immaterial operations. The soul, without doubt, ought to be sufficiently strong to subdue and govern the sensual appetites. But, unhappily, she is not. As a result of original sin, the passions have gained a great ascendancy over the superior faculties; and, on the other hand, the mind and the will have been deprived of the preternatural prerogatives of the state of innocence. We have not always, then, even under the action of grace, absolute dominion over our passions. "We know, in fact," says St. Paul, "that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin; for that which I work I understand not. For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do. . . . I find then a law that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me to the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii, 14–24.)

Furthermore, faith teaches us that the devil, furious at having lost his place in eternal glory, filled with hatred in regard to men, and jealous of God's glory, gives himself no respite. He tries to exploit to his own advantage and for our ruin the disorders which original sin and the weakness of our nature have caused in us. "Be sober and watch," cries St. Peter, "for your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."

2. But if the irreconcilable enemy of the human race usurps such power over men, God, whose love for us is manifested with such splendor, does not abandon those who are willing to receive His mediation. This is evident in the case of those faithful Christians who by grace are made the temples of the Holy Ghost. This Divine Spirit comes to our aid, strengthens us, and assures us of victory in the combat. "The Holy Ghost succors our infirmity," says the Apostle to the Romans. More than this, He becomes for all the devout disciples of Christ a powerful light, which permits them the better to comprehend their duties, and He imparts to them the strength to fulfill them.

Christ solemnly promised to solicit from His

Father this favor for His own; and we know that the Father refuses nothing to His Son. "If you love Me," He said to His Apostles, "keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and He shall send you another Consoler, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of Truth, . . . whom my Father will send in my name; he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I have said to you."

And, in fact, when after the Ascension of the Saviour, the Apostles found themselves reunited in the Supper-Chamber in company with the Blessed Virgin, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting, and there appeared to them, as it were, parted tongues of fire, and it sat upon every one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost imparted to them not only the gift of tongues, but a wisdom and a strength like that which the deacon, Stephen, manifested in the presence of his persecutors, and which nothing could resist.

This favor was not to constitute a privilege for the faithful of the Infant Church. It was to be the common gift of all the disciples of

Christ regenerated in the waters of Baptism, faithful to grace, and strengthened by the benefits of Confirmation.

If then the spirit of darkness exploits all the bad tendencies of our fallen nature in order to draw us into evil, the Spirit of Light makes use of all the noble aspirations which have yet remained in our soul, and of the infinite resources of the Redemption to force us to good and make us draw towards Christ and God. This work the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us by the interior lights which make us know what we ought to do. "Let His Spirit conduct me," says the Psalm. But he who is conducted does not act of himself. Consequently, the spiritual man is not only instructed by the Holy Ghost upon the conduct he is to adhere to, but his heart is moved by Him.

Hence, in addition to the divine concurrence necessary to the act of every second cause, and to grace by which our human faculties are supernaturalized and can produce acts conformed to their power of acting, the Holy Ghost on occasions of special difficulty, or in virtue of a special love, accords from time to time extraordinary motions. He, I say, imparts suggestions and inspirations of an order apart,

superior to those which the uncertain needs of our imperfect habits claim; divine instincts which operate in us without our having part in the determination that puts us in activity, but not without our acting vitally and with the fullest consent of our will; for the motion of the Holy Ghost is eminently sweet and at the same time sovereignly efficacious.

These graces have a name in theological language: whilst we call *actual graces* those coöperating in ordinary concurrence, these are named *operating graces.*

These instincts or inspirations of the Holy Ghost are distinct from the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are permanent habits, whilst these are transitory lights.

II

1. Let us now see, what are the nature, the extent, and the functions of the lights of the Holy Ghost. The light and strength of ordinary grace, which all Christians interested in their eternal salvation possess, enable them to resist temptations and fulfill all their duties. Very often, however, the Christian finds himself in the presence, not only of faults which it behooves him at all costs to avoid, or of virtues

which he must absolutely practise under pain of losing the supernatural life and of compromising his salvation; but of acts which have for their special end to help or advance him in the ways of perfection,—acts, perhaps, indifferent in themselves, but which have a direct influence upon his spiritual progress.

In these circumstances reason is often powerless to determine what is preferable to do or to avoid. Ordinary grace, moreover, neither condemns nor approves absolutely the doing or omitting of such an act, whose relation with the betterment and the perfection of his soul is not evident. It is then that the interior lights of the Holy Ghost intervene and help us to decide.

Feeble in souls little preoccupied with their spiritual advancement, these lights are more vivid and continuous in those who have a real desire for perfection, and they shine forth with a clearness more intense still in contemplatives whose one end is union with God by the most perfect exercise.

Those contemplative souls go forward in the brightness of a supernatural light which never fails them. They are led by incessant inspirations in what concerns even the most ordi-

nary and indifferent actions. They see very clearly the conduct they ought to observe in order to fulfill faithfully the will of God and thus increase a holy love in their souls. This extraordinary light is accorded them by reason of their habitual recollection and of their application to withdraw themselves from all sensible things to give themselves exclusively to God, upon whom they concentrate their attention.

2. In a special manner this interior light shows, (a) the circumstances the most opportune for virtue, when and how an act can be accomplished with more perfection, when and how it will be more useful for spiritual progress; (b) the kind of prayer required to obtain a success more complete; (c) the fitness of certain exercises such as reading, study, pious conversations; the search for solitude, or the undertaking of a work; the acceptance or the refusal of certain occupations, etc.; and in general, the fulfillment or the omission of every act indifferent in itself, but susceptible of cooperating to a greater good.

Ordinarily, in the presence of this kind of action or omission, the interior inspiration inclines to abstention; for these exterior occupa-

tions which do not present themselves clearly by reason of an evident good, beget distraction and render more difficult recollection, abstraction of mind, and the habitual thought of God.

That noted ascetic writer, Father Austen Baker, who lived in the seventeenth century, enumerates among the things it is preferable to avoid as intimated by the lights of the Holy Ghost, the following: (1) all useless conversations and correspondence; (2) all interference, not fully justified, in another's affairs; (3) the seeking advantages or comforts whose necessity is not apparent; (4) questions and inquiries, modifications and changes, which are not of evident or urgent interest; (5) accusations or excuses which a superior motive does not require; (6) distractions or friendships susceptible of occasioning interior dissipation; (7) occupations capable of encumbering or fatiguing the mind; (8) inquietudes of conscience, scruples, and mental efforts which deprive the soul of tranquillity, peace, and joy in the service of the good God. "In a word," concludes the author of the beautiful book of *Holy Wisdom,* "the divine inspirations tend always to the most absolute simplicity in thoughts, words, and actions, and lead towards all the

things that can assure the most perfect exercise of obedience, humility, resignation, purity of intention, and the excellence of prayer, etc., in such sort that we must avoid as a suggestion of the evil spirit all that is contrary to this conduct."

Thus, that which distinguishes inspiration from ordinary grace, is a sort of supernatural instinct which carries the soul to act in a determined fashion in cases where with the best intentions it remains undecided.

3. The greater part of the actions we have signalized are indifferent in themselves and receive their morality only from the circumstances which determine them, or the intentions which direct them and make of them acts culpable or meritorious, good or better. Now even supposing that a soul is seriously desirous of acting to the best of her spiritual interest, it happens often that, placed in the presence of a determination which presents itself and which is not rigorously indicated by the nature of the act, she is in suspense. It can happen that what in her point of view is preferable, is not in reality for her spiritual advancement. Without doubt her loyal desire will preserve her from all faults; it will be meritorious, but it will not

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coöperate directly to her sanctification. It is the purpose of the interior lights of the Holy Ghost to relieve the soul from incertitude and to make her act according to the desires of God.

The more the soul is recollected, the more she advances in perfection; the more vivid, abundant, and habitual also those lights are. This is why the saints possess that supernatural assurance which makes them avoid the excess of an unjustified confidence and of all exaggerated fear, and which gives all their acts the just note that is most agreeable to God.

4. This interior light of the Holy Ghost can be habitual or actual, permanent or transitory.

The permanent light is nothing else but the virtue of spiritual discretion, without which even the most brilliant actions are of no profit to the soul. Such actions are, for instance, voluntary mortifications, alms, etc. When these acts do not proceed from perfect charity, and do not show an increase of the interior life and of sanctification, far from being useful to the soul, they cause it a true prejudice by lessening its virtue.

These two conditions are indispensable to the merit of an action which must come from God

and return to Him. It does not suffice, then, that a soul proposes to herself to act *in view of God;* she must be conscious that in the given circumstance she acts *according to the good pleasure of God,* and according to the interior inspiration which comes from Him. For, according to the expression of Tauler, "God will reward only the actions that come from Him," that is to say, those that He has ordained to be accomplished.

Nevertheless, as long as this light is simply diffused in the mind by permitting it to see in an habitual fashion the good pleasure of God, it does not fulfill the functions of a guide or director; it does not *conduct* the soul. But at the moment when, by reason of circumstances that demand it, God inclines the will to action, the interior light becomes active. It at once concentrates its rays on a determined point; it puts that point well in evidence; it helps to determine what is to be done and how we must act so that the soul is perfectly decided on what she must accomplish. In this case God appears clearly as the Interior Director of the soul. He is the light, actual or transitory, which is the proper cause of the illuminations of which I speak here.

5. Now this precious light is at the disposition of all men of good will who seek God in the sincerity of their hearts. It is not the privilege of contemplative souls alone, or of those who lead a life of high perfection; but it is accorded to all those who tend to perfection in the ordinary practices of the Christian life. It is by the aid of this superior light that imperfect souls can purify themselves from the shackles of personal interest and egotism, organize their existence, foresee the consequences and connection of their occupations. If they have a care on the morning of each day to implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, so that they may act only under the guidance of the love of God and for His greater glory; if they persevere in this holy resolution; if they have recourse to prayer at fitting times in difficulties or uncertainties, it cannot be doubted that, in addition to a superabundance of light, those souls will insensibly acquire a high degree of perfection.

Nevertheless, it is important that this effort be accomplished gently, without constraint, without complication, in such sort that negligence in fidelity to those resolutions does not become an occasion for scruples.

In these conditions the light of the interior inspirations will become more and more habitual and dispel the darkness of indecision in the midst of which the soul advances so painfully.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE

How we are to Coöperate with the Illuminations of the Holy Ghost

I

1. Having established the reality of those extraordinary motions of grace accorded us from time to time, which are called "illuminations of the Holy Ghost," having seen what are their nature, extent, and functions, we now go on to study how we can coöperate to make them fruitful and to advance our sanctification through them.

We cannot long give attention to this work without discovering, side by side with this authorized and sure Guide, an intruder who aspires to subject us to his influence by usurping rights which do not belong to him. This is the old enemy of the human race, the antagonist of Jesus Christ. We must then first of all shake off the yoke of this intruder and reduce him to silence. Then we shall be free to fix all our at-

tention on the lessons of our heavenly Instructor.

2. The two great means that the enemy of souls employs to compass his ends, are distractions aroused by the imagination, and troubles occasioned by the passions. The first effort of our soul with the end of preparing ourselves to enjoy peaceably the interior lights, consists in ridding ourselves of those sensible images and calming the inferior appetites.

To rid ourselves of the tiring activities of the imagination we should observe the following programme, which we shall come to realize only after a long and vigilant exercise: (1) We should never occupy ourselves with affairs that do not concern us; (2) we should mortify our natural curiosity, which leads us to inquire into a thousand details that have no relation with our perfection; (3) we should avoid useless conversations; lastly, we should, (and this I want to impress on you especially) reduce our thoughts to a minimum, and direct those that it is opportune for us to cultivate, towards a region always favorable to our spiritual progress.

To calm the violence of the passions we must, (a) remove every dangerous friendship;

(b) avoid all preoccupation concerning our well-being or personal concern, (c) free ourselves as soon as possible from the shackles of pride, ambition, anger, hatred, impatience, melancholy, sadness, scruples, and that from their first appearance. For the mind and the heart have so much more difficulty in escaping from these traps of the devil, as they allow themselves the more to be occupied with them from the beginning. Lastly, we must strengthen ourselves against the return of those pernicious influences by preserving ourselves in calmness, peace, and resignation. To this end we must avoid: undue eagerness in the fulfillment of our duties, even the most rigorous and urgent; deep resentment following on events contrary to us; vexation caused by our neighbors and the check of our undertakings; finally, interior agitation capable of producing in us a too lively emotion of joy or sadness.

II

1. After we have weakened the means of action of nature and the devil, it still remains for us to facilitate the influence of the Holy Ghost; and to this end we shall have to assure

ourselves of *that complete independence and liberty of spirit* so indispensable to good results of supernatural direction, but at the same time so extremely difficult to obtain; yes, so extremely difficult to obtain; for often we create impediments designedly for oursleves, and try, unconsciously at least, to trace out a line of conduct for the Holy Ghost, who finds Himself in some sort constrained to lead us into the way of His choice.

2. Among the impediments in which pious souls are accustomed to involve themselves are: (1) confessions multiplied under the influence of fear and scruples; (2) examens of conscience made without discretion, delaying much more on the material fault than on the responsibility coming from negligence or ill will; (3) general or detailed reviews of a past sufficiently in order as a consequence of care habitually given to the reception of the Sacraments; (4) especially, the surcharge of religious practices, mortifications, or vocal prayers; (5) the wish to observe the examples of virtue one finds set forth in works of piety, and which have no relation with the action of grace by which the soul is disposed; (6) the mania of wishing to imitate what one admires

in others without taking account of the fittingness of such an effort; (7) the imprudence of binding oneself by promises or vows, without having maturely reflected and taken counsel. All these practices and many others of the same kind cramp, fatigue, and discourage the soul, and prevent that liberty of spirit which is indispensable for the initiative of the Holy Ghost. This is why the soul that wishes to be faithful to her supernatural motion must apply herself to simplify as much as possible her religious life, to give herself with all possible ardor to the exercises of self-possession, recollection, interior peace, confidence in God, and spiritual joy. It is in this calm and serene atmosphere that the Holy Ghost speaks, and it is only in these circumstances that the soul can hear, comprehend, and follow His counsels.

3. Now, to this effect we ought above all to practise prudence and charity. By prudence, the soul looks with contempt on the works she accomplishes; by charity, she unites herself most intimately with the Holy Ghost, whence come light and strength. It is in some sort through the harmonious accord of foresight and inspiration that the soul acts holily.

Humanly speaking, prudence plays a great

rôle in the organization, and above all in the steady progress, of life. It sheds after its manner a brilliant light on the soul, a light which is reflected on events and circumstances, which thus permit us the better to see them; the better to appraise them at their just value; to form a judgment more equitable concerning them; to come to determinations more opportune; to live, in fine, in a manner more comformable to right reason and more useful in the interest of the man himself, who has a care to practise this virtue in all his actions.

But when grace comes into the soul, it is accompanied by all the infused virtues, and, consequently, by *supernatural* prudence. Under this influence reason sees more clearly and discovers an infinity of things useful to know, which natural prudence had not made known to her.

This supernatural prudence enables us not only to appraise things more justly according to their peculiar circumstances, but, moreover and above all, it gives them their true direction in making us see the works of life in their true light, from the supernatural angle of eternity.

Prudence, thus exalted and transformed, imparts a competence infinitely more precise and

assured in the conduct of life, which it directs even to the confines of glory.

This supernatural prudence becomes still more sagacious and rich in its means of action when the interior lights of the Holy Ghost render more brilliant the lights of ordinary grace, precisely determining their direction in the manner of acting that ought to be followed. It utilizes all the resources of grace and nature. This is why the soul that wishes to draw from them all advantages, ought to be guided according to the precepts of natural and supernatural prudence, taking care to subordinate the ones to the others according to the degree which they occupy in the moral hierarchy; to sacrifice the counsels of human prudence to the indications of supernatural prudence, and to follow the interior inspirations when they urge in a way that ordinary grace does not impose, while still it approves.

4. The practice of charity facilitates this delicate task. It is charity more than prudence that ought to assure the good use of the lights of the Holy Ghost. In fact, the darkness which obscures our understanding, and the blindness of heart, the principal causes of the want of prudence in the order of human things as in the

supernatural economy, arise principally from the disorders which self-love causes in our will. This inveterate self-love paralyses the will and denies to the intelligence its complete liberty of action.

It is at this point that, well instructed though we may be by faith in the duties of piety and virtue which are imposed on us, we still allow ourselves to be conducted by self-love. Self-love persuades us to withdraw ourselves from them, or it suggests to us a thousand pretexts to dispense ourselves from them; in such sort that by its inter-meddling, in spite of the lights of faith destined to enlighten and conduct us, we go astray and lose the right way.

But as soon as charity enters into our soul, self-love tends to depart. The more ardent and active charity is, the weaker and more inert becomes self-love. When charity dominates and rules with absolute sway, self-love disappears, for the two tendencies are diametrically opposed to each other. They cannot reign together in the same heart. Charity rectifies the irregularities produced in the will by self-love. It discloses its suggestions more or less subtle, its false pretexts, its deceitful and evil interests, all its inadmissible pretentions. Thus the

intellect, over which it exercised an illegitimate influence, regains its liberty.

The intellect, having regained its liberty, becomes master of itself and of its acts. Sustained, moreover, by the force of charity, or love of God, it sees things as they are and in what direction they ought to tend. It contemplates them under the eye of God. It sees God in them, uses them to come closer to God under the action of a more lively and active faith.

In these circumstances the will, having regained its independence, brought face to face with self-love, and strengthened by charity, offers its concurrence to the intellect. Far from begetting difficulties and accumulating obstacles, it prepares the way. It inclines the reason to acquit itself of its functions with more energy and constancy. It removes all the causes of distraction in order to facilitate its task. It urges it in the way in which it is itself drawn by charity.

The more powerful the action of charity is upon the will, the more efficaciously the will acts upon reason, and the more reason is capable of enjoying the lights of faith and the illuminations of the Holy Ghost, and of giving to the whole of life a direction conformable to the

divine views in the way that most surely conducts the soul to God.

Charity, then, is the virtue *par excellence*, which predisposes the soul for the influence of the Holy Ghost. It enables her to see her way clearly, to avoid as if by instinct every false step, to walk briskly without stumbling or falling, to advance without inquietude or hesitation, to arrive, in fine, more rapidly at the goal of perfection.

5. Lastly, the gifts of the Holy Ghost intervene most happily to facilitate the good use of those inspirations.

The effects of those interior lights, seconded by prudence and charity, do not delay in making themselves felt in the soul; for the spiritual progress which they assure is extremely sensible. It is an inviolable fidelity to all the commandments of God; to the counsels, or to the spirit of the counsels, according to the particular vocation of the soul. It is a wise discretion in the use of mortification which knows how to unite the spirit of penance with the care necessary for the body. It is regular fervor in prayer which is made with moderation, but in a constant ascent by the degrees which make for approach nearer and nearer to God. It is a bal-

anced judgment of all the events, circumstances, and persons whose common action forms the atmosphere in which the soul lives. It is a just appraisal of all the claims of conscience which it keeps sheltered from fear and carelessness, from scruples and relaxation. It is, in a word, the equilibrium almost constant in moderation, which enables the soul to give to all its acts a great supernatural perfection.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Gifts of the Holy Ghost

I

1. We have now studied the "lights of the Holy Ghost," and have seen the results of their beneficent action. But the "lights of the Holy Ghost" are but passing motions of the Sovereign Conductor of our souls, guiding us in the way that leads to perfection; whereas the *Gifts* of the Holy Ghost are *permanent habits* which reside in us as long as we are in the state of grace, and exercise on our spiritual powers a constant supernatural influence, perfecting them amid the uncertainties of life and causing us to approach nearer to God by supernatural knowledge and love.

2. The first thing to be known concerning the Gifts is their nature. What do we understand by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost?

The Gifts of the Holy Ghost are supernatural and infused dispositions or habits, that is

to say, permanent qualities communicated to the soul together with sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtues, to the end of rendering us prompt, pliant, and docile to the divine inspirations. In the exercise of the virtues they lead us to practise them in an excellent, superhuman, and, so to speak, divine manner. Their number is seven—wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and the fear of the Lord. The first four perfect the intellect; the last three, the will. By the Gifts of the Holy Ghost God facilitates in us the practice of all virtues. Faith, hope, and charity are more particularly excited by the gifts of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom; prudence is animated by the gift of counsel; justice, by the gift of piety; fortitude, by the gift of fortitude; temperance, by the gift of fear.

Let us here only indicate the general relations that exist between the Gifts and the virtues; the adequate treatment of the Gifts, which forms a department of the science of the interior life, would require a volume.

The Gifts of the Holy Ghost, like the infused virtues, are supernatural dispositions or habits which enable us to perform holy acts,

worthy of eternal life. But there is this difference between them. The Gifts do not produce works of a particular nature; but they have a more elevated rule, and consequently move us to perform more perfect acts, or, at least, in a manner more prompt and facile.

The rule that directs the Gifts is no longer reason alone enlightened by faith, as is the case with the virtues, but the Holy Spirit Himself.

When a man, under the influence of grace, performs some act of virtue, he acts of his own motion and as a result of deliberation, and he is bound to conduct himself after the rules of reason or of faith, according as there is question of an act of *acquired* or *infused* virtue.

If there is question of an act in affinity with the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, the man is, so to speak, carried without reasoning by the motion of the Holy Ghost outside of the ordinary rules of nature and of grace. The acts produced by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, proceeding from a principle more elevated, are more perfect, or, at least, are performed more promptly and easily. It is a superior mode of action. The virtues bring about action in an or-

dinary manner; the Gifts effect the practice of the virtues in a superhuman, shall I say, in a divine manner.

Let us cite an example. I seek to know a thing by considering it in its natural cause; this is natural science, the fruit of reason. I seek to know a truth by the aid of revelation; this is theological science, drawn from the principles of faith. I consider created things in relation to God, without reasoning and by an interior light which causes me to judge and appraise them by views wholly supernatural; it is the science of the true children of God which has for its principle the Holy Ghost Himself. Such is the superior rule that directs the gifts.

3. Some have thought that the acts of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are reserved exclusively to the heroic virtues or those of counsel, and that in the practice of the ordinary virtues, those Gifts always remain inactive. This would be, on the testimony of a great number of authors, to circumscribe far too much the action of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

According to those, their action extends to a multitude of circumstances where the will of God demands of us a certain promptness and a very great facility in the practice of the or-

dinary virtues of the Christian life, as, for example, when there is question of withdrawing oneself from one's vices, of subduing one's passions, of resisting temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil, especially when the frailty of the subject demands a succor more complete and efficacious, and, as a consequence, a more elevated principle of action. This last sentiment, which we believe to be the expression of truth, is founded on this, that the Gifts do not produce works of a kind particular and distinct from the virtues, but simply come to our aid so that we may practise all the virtues in a more prompt and easy manner.

II

1. The question might be asked, do the Gifts of the Holy Ghost hold a preëminence over the virtues?

The Gifts of the Holy Ghost certainly excel the moral virtues in the order of dignity and perfection. In fact, the moral virtues of themselves produce works conformable to prudence natural, or supernatural, only according as they are acquired, or infused; while the Gifts dispose the heart to follow the divine inspirations. The theological virtues hold the first

rank, because they unite us directly with God. Meanwhile, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are adapted to come to the aid of all, even the theological, virtues. With regard to these latter, it is true the gifts can be considered as faithful servants which give assistance to their masters; but the help is no less real, since the acts are more complete and perfect.

2. It might be further asked, are the gifts of the Holy Ghost necessary to salvation?

Without a doubt. God labors to perfect us in two ways: by the natural light of reason and by the infused virtues. The latter perfection is evidently greater than the former; it is supernatural. Meanwhile, it ceases not to be imperfect, since even with the theological virtues we know and love God only imperfectly. Indeed, we possess those virtues only in an incomplete manner.

In all that belongs to the domain of reason and tends to a natural end, we can, with the aid of God, act of ourselves. *This* we cannot do when there is question of a supernatural end. Reason, it is true, *informed* by the theological virtues, carries us there. But this impulse does not suffice because it is imperfect. We need the *motion* of the Holy Ghost.

"Those who are led by the Holy Ghost," says St. Paul, "are the children of God and his heirs." This is why, in order to arrive at this supernatural end, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are absolutely necessary.

3. God in His infinite bounty multiplies His gifts to aid us in all our wants. "Not content with making us pass over the grade of justification, the Divine Spirit directs our steps and aids us to walk even to the end in the way of salvation. Once He has entered into a soul, He does not remain idle. He labors to sanctify her by accomplishing in her and with her all that can conduce to her supernatural end. What can be more happy than to possess such a Guest within oneself, to have such a Master, a Guide so enlightened, a Friend like Him, a Stay so firm? As He is *by eminence* all things, He effects all operations in the soul where He makes His abode. He is fire, and as such enlightens our understanding, warms our heart, separates us from earth and elevates us towards Heaven. He is a dove; behold why He makes us sincere, sweet, simple, compassionate, full of tender affection for one another. He is a mysterious cloud; He protects us against the immoderate ardors of the flesh; He calms and tempers the

fire of our passions; He is an impetuous wind; He inclines and turns our will towards all that is good; He makes it disgusted with and separates it from all evil. It is easy to see that all our blessings, and particularly our advancement in virtue, come from this Divine Spirit. If we hold ourselves aloof from evil, it is He who separates us from it. If we accomplish any good, it is through Him. If we persevere, He is the principle of our perseverance. Finally, if we win the victory, it is He who will crown His own gifts."

As we have already said, and the conclusion is confirmed by Venerable Louis of Granada, whom we have cited, the necessity of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost is felt not only in the practice of the heroic virtues and those of counsel; it extends equally to the ordinary virtues of the Christian life. The wounds made in our nature by original sin, by our bad habits, by the temptations that assail us, by all the difficulties inherent in the practice of virtue, appeal to this help of the divine mercy. Thus the greater number of spiritual authors apply themselves to enlarge the sphere of action of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in ascribing them to come to our aid in all the degrees of the Christian and

interior life, to those who commence and progress, as well as to those already perfect. This solidly founded doctrine is capable of inspiring in souls eager for perfection a more ardent desire of possessing those Gifts and an emulation more generous in view of meriting them.

4. And this leads us to consider how we must prepare ourselves to receive the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

To participate in the Gifts of the Holy Ghost we must be united with Jesus Christ by faith and charity. Christ is the principle and the foundation of the supernatural order, and it is by Him that every celestial gift flows into our souls. He is "full of grace and truth," and "we all receive of His fulness." The more we are united with Christ by faith and charity, the more we participate in the efficacy of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, this union with the Divine Saviour not only excites in us an ardent desire to possess those gifts, but also causes us to make generous efforts with a view to meriting their increase.

"If you ask me," says the venerable Louis of Granada, "by what means you may be able to obtain those admirable Gifts of the Holy Ghost; know that He who confers them also

prepares the soul to receive them. We must then beseech Him to prepare us to receive these Gifts. This is what St. Augustine did in these terms: 'Lord, the habitation of my soul is narrow; enlarge it, that you may come into it. It is a ruin; repair it. It has what offends your eyes, I know; but who will be able to purify it? or whom other than you shall I invoke, saying: Purify me, Lord, from my hidden stains.'" We prepare, then, for the Holy Ghost a habitation worthy of Him by supplicating Him assiduously to deign to prepare for Himself a pure tabernacle in our souls.

Meanwhile, let no one imagine that this alone is sufficient if he does not himself set his hand to the work. We must also apply ourselves to adorn our soul with all the virtues. What is the signification of that magnificent Tabernacle of the Covenant set up by Moses, with its colors, its figures, and all its ornamentation, if not the faithful soul wherein resides the Holy Ghost? The soul must be adorned with virtues and celestial gifts in order to become a tabernacle worthy of God.

We see those who, smitten with the charms of prayer, yet recoil before the bitterness of mortification. They offer incense to God, but

refuse Him myrrh. We see them pray often, and yet they do not become better.

Before the Tabernacle was a veil of four colors—purple, scarlet, white, and hyacinth. By the purple color we understand patience. Scarlet twice-dyed represents the two precepts of the law. The fine twisted linen is a figure of chastity, which does not preserve itself long without mortification. Finally, the hyacinth or azure color signifies the love of heavenly things, which directs all our thoughts, all our desires, and all our efforts towards the joys of eternity. May the Holy Ghost deign to conduct us thither, He for whom by all those means we prepare a home in our souls.

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Gifts of Understanding and Wisdom

I

1. Having seen what are the gifts of the Holy Ghost, their necessity and their relations to the supernatural virtues, we go on to make some remarks concerning two, and these the most eminent, of them, namely, wisdom and understanding. From them we may judge of the worth and utility of the others as gifts coming from the same Spirit of love and beneficence.

What is understanding? It is a gift of the Holy Ghost that enables us to know and *penetrate* the truths of the supernatural order. The name itself (Latin: *intelligentia*) indicates an intimate knowledge; for it signifies, *intus legere,* to penetrate to the depth of things. The gift of understanding corresponds to and supposes faith. But it differs from it in this sense, that faith is a simple assent to revealed

truth, and can exist independently of sanctifying grace, whereas the gift of understanding implies a certain penetration of revealed truths relating to salvation, which God does not accord to those who are in the state of mortal sin. The just man cannot penetrate all the truths of the supernatural order; nevertheless, by the gift of understanding he will always enter in a sufficient manner into the depth of the truths necessary for his salvation and sanctification.

The gift of understanding is both speculative and practical. It applies itself not only to things which primarily and principally constitute the object of faith, but into all those that have a relation to it, such as good works. These do not form the principal object of the gift of understanding. Nevertheless, we ought to regulate our lives according to the eternal truths. There are, then, in this motion of the Holy Spirit speculative and practical effects.

For the rest, the gift of understanding does not take away faith, its obscurity or merit. There are revealed truths which are directly and of themselves the object of our faith, such as the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and others of the same nature, which we cannot compre-

hend even with the gift of understanding. But there are secondary truths which have relation to the mysteries of faith and which the gift of understanding enables us to comprehend and penetrate.

We know, then, that revealed truths have in them nothing contradictory and that the objections which the impious raise against them are not sufficient to reject them.

2. We distinguish three degrees in the gift of understanding.

In the first degree the soul is filled with a divine light, which enables her to believe all the revealed truths so soundly and indubitably that nothing can shake her faith. It is thus that every Christian in the state of grace possesses the gift of understanding at least in a sufficient degree to know and believe what is necessary for salvation. We can, it is true, strengthen our faith by the laborious consideration of motives of credibility; but this is not given to all, and how much more prompt and easy is the action of the gift of understanding!

We see, in truth, simple and illiterate souls, incapable of rendering to themselves an account of their faith, arrive at the same end by a special motion of the Holy Ghost. Often

the adhesion of such souls to the revealed truths surpasses in strength the faith of learned theologians.

3. In the second degree the soul enlightened by the gift of understanding penetrates more deeply into the truths of faith. She discovers in them, together with exactness, supreme fitness and admires in them sublime beauties. She easily and promptly comprehends the mysteries of religion and adheres to them with all the energy of a living and unshaken faith. Nothing detains her, neither the annihilations of the Word made Flesh, nor the sufferings of Calvary, nor the miracles of mercy and love which Christ the Conqueror of death works in the Church. Truth is shown forth with a clearness and an evidence that are prodigious.

St. Cecelia sent Valerian to the holy old man, Pope St. Urban. Suddenly there appeared to the astonished view of the young man and of the Pontiff another ancient, holding in his hands a book, in which were written these words: "One God, one faith, one Baptism." When the young patrician had finished reading, the unknown old man said: "Dost thou believe it?" "Nothing is more true," cried Valerian. Such a response could only be the

fruit of the gift of understanding in a degree far beyond the ordinary.

4. In the third degree the soul enlightened by the gift of understanding sees the truths of faith openly, so to speak. She is introduced into the most intimate secrets of God. It is a sort of angelic contemplation. The soul penetrates into the depths of the divine mysteries. She renders an account to herself of the prophecies of the old law. She scrutinizes the oracles of the Gospel. She searches into the most sublime doctrines of the Church's teaching, and there discovers most admirable truths with a truly divine perception.

II

1. We now turn to wisdom (*sapientia*).

What is wisdom? It is a gift of the Holy Ghost, a divine philosophy, which makes known to us divine things by means of their first causes and reasons, and enables us to make a judgment sound and full of suavity, through a certain sympathy or inclination (*connaturalitas*) which God pours into our hearts.

Understanding conceives and penetrates; it is the property of wisdom to judge and com-

pare. It causes us to judge of all things created through the knowledge we have of God, their principle and end. It contemplates and appraises God in Himself and in His infinite perfections.

Between the gifts of wisdom and understanding there are numerous relations. Both belong to the highest region of the soul, and have for their object divine things. Both occupy an exceptional rank in the interior life. They are the noblest and most perfect of all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Nevertheless, they differ in many points. The gift of wisdom judges of the truth with a relish, a supernatural motion or instinct; the gift of understanding is content to make known the truth with penetration and clearness. The gift of wisdom is so to speak the end and the fruit of the gift of understanding. The latter leads to wisdom, as knowledge goes before judgment; and vision, taste. The gift of wisdom occupies itself wholly with things divine; the gift of understanding applies itself not only to things divine, but also to all things that have relation with them. The gift of understanding extends itself to a greater number of objects than the gift of wisdom. Nevertheless, this lat-

ter, in all that concerns divine things, excels in perfection the gift of understanding, because it carries with it a marvelous relish or sweetness (*suavitas*), which becomes a new source of light.

There is also found, it is true, a certain relish or *taste* in the operations of the gift of understanding, but it is not so pure or so vehement or so deiform as is that of the gift of wisdom.

For the rest, the gift of wisdom is the first and most perfect of all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. It exercises over them the same empire and the same influence that charity does over the other virtues. This is why we often attribute to it the acts of other Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which in reality come to it only indirectly by reason of its superiority and its sovereign authority.

The gift of wisdom consists, then, in a sublime light which shows us the First Cause, and makes us judge and order all second causes by that First Cause. God judges and ordains all things by His infinite wisdom. We participate in this wisdom through the Holy Ghost, according to the words of the Apostle: "The spiritual man judgeth all things," because "the

spirit searcheth all things, even the secrets of God."

This gift enables us to judge divine things, whether by way of consideration, *i. e.,* by contemplating them in themselves, or by way of counsel, *i. e.,* judging and directing our actions by them.

Wisdom has, then, for its principal object the contemplation of divine things, and for its secondary object, the right direction of our actions conformably to divine reasons. The gift of wisdom imparts to us also a sweet and truly celestial relish (*gustus*) for God and divine things. This relish comes from the light shed in our soul by the Holy Ghost. Nothing surpasses the sweet joys of wisdom. "Be the first to run home to thy house," says the Wise Man, "and there give thyself to play." "In this passage," says St. Thomas, "the Sage recalls man to himself and says to him: Be the first to return home to thy house; which signifies, hasten to quit exterior things before your mind gets engaged and distracted by any object that may preoccupy it. It is written, When I go into my house I shall repose myself with her, that is, with wisdom."

Justly is the contemplation of wisdom com-

pared to play, for two reasons. In the first place, *play,* that is, the subject of play, or sport, gives pleasure. The contemplation of wisdom is also the source of the most sweet joys. Wisdom herself has said it: "My spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb."

In the second place, the *diversion* of play is sought for its own sake. It is the same with the sweets of wisdom. Sometimes it happens that one rejoices entirely in thinking of what he desires, or of what he wishes to do, but he does not yet possess those things; and if they fail to be realized, or something retards their accomplishment, he is afflicted at least as much as he is rejoiced, according to the words of Proverbs: "Joy will be mingled with sorrow."

On the contrary, the delight that results from contemplation possesses in itself the cause of delight, which effects that man experiences neither fear nor anxiety, as when he thinks something is wanting in him; for it is written in the Book of Wisdom: "Her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness." Thus Divine Wisdom is compared to a game, a diversion, from the celestial joys that it procures for us.

Read the whole twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, where "Wisdom praiseth her own self and is honored in God, and glorifieth herself in the sight of his power." There is nothing more beautiful and sublime in all Scripture: "I came out of the mouth of the Most High," she says, "the first born before all creatures. I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth. I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of cloud. I alone have compassed the circuit of the heaven, and have penetrated into the bottom of the deep, and have walked in the waves of the sea, and have stood in all the earth and in every people; and in every nation I have had the chief rule, and by my power I have trodden under my feet the hearts of all the high and low, and in all these I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord. Then the Creator of all things commanded and said to me; and He that made me rested in my tabernacle, and He said to me: 'Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thy inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect.'

"From the beginning and before the world was, was I created, and in the world to come

I shall not cease to be, and in the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before Him. And so I was established in Sion, and in the holy city likewise I rested, and my power was in Jerusalem, and I took root in an honorable people, and in the portion of my God. His inheritance and my abode is in the full assembly of saints. I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus, and as a cypress tree on Mount Sion. I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades, and as a rose plant in Jericho. As a fair olive tree in the plains, and as a plane tree by the water in the streets was I exalted. I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm. I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh, and I perfumed my dwelling as storax and galbanum, and onyx, and aloes, and as the frankincense not cut, and my odor is as the purest balm. I have stretched out my branches as the turpentine tree, and my branches are of honor and grace. As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor, and my flowers are the fruit of honor and riches. I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way, and of the truth, and in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me all ye that desire

me, and be filled with my fruits. For my spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. My memory is unto everlasting generations. They that eat me shall yet hunger, and they that drink me shall yet thirst. He that hearkeneth to me shall not be confounded, and they that work by me shall not sin. They that explain me shall have life everlasting." So far the Book of Ecclesiasticus in praise of the joys of contemplation and the gift of wisdom.

Aspire after this gift of Holy Wisdom, so delightful, so necessary to our spiritual well-being here below. Prize it and pray for it as the chief and mistress of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. In anticipation of its reception prepare the tabernacle of your soul by the practice of the Christian virtues and counsels. Put on the patience and longanimity of Jesus Christ in His Passion and throughout His whole life. Fulfill the double precept of charity towards God and your neighbor. Cultivate the chastity of Jesus Christ, which is maintained and perfected by self-denial. Finally, be inflamed with a love of celestial things, which will direct all your thoughts, desires, and efforts towards the joys of eternity.

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE

Wisdom, the Source of the Most Perfect Knowledge of Divine Things

I

1. Having seen what is the gift of wisdom, its relations with, and difference from, the gift of understanding, we go on to consider it as the source of the most perfect knowledge of divine things. This it truly is, as the following considerations will show.

It causes us to "taste and see," and consequently love truth in the First Cause, that is to say, in God. This love is a true light, for light comes also from experience. It is this that made St. Gregory say that love is a true knowledge. In fact, knowledge of divine things is very much developed in souls inflamed with the fire of charity. They see the excess of divine goodness in its source, and also in the numberless benefits that flow from it. Those who have neither seen nor experienced those

things will never have a perfect knowledge of divine things. This experimental knowledge is altogether supernatural. It belongs to the gift of wisdom and comes from an intimate union with God.

Now it is love that unites us thus to God and makes us become one with Him. Did not the Saviour say to His disciples that He made known to them His secrets because they were His true friends? This experimental knowledge is so perfect that the soul raised to a union of divine transformation finds by it a new sort of certitude, which causes her to see the mysteries of faith as it were openly. The soul continues to believe divine truths by faith, but she tastes them, and in tasting them, she sees them as clearly and perfectly as it is possible to see them on earth. The Psalmist had reason to say: "Taste and see." The experience of divine things gives certitude, and this certitude fills the soul with ineffable consolation.

When there is question of corporal things, such as fruits, for example, we commence by looking at them, and then taste them. Spiritual things we must taste in order to see them.

2. Furthermore, charity is the principle and the measure of the gift of wisdom. St. Cather-

ine of Siena one day heard a voice from Heaven which said to her: "Some are astonished and murmur when they see people without learning more enlightened on truth than those who have studied a long time. This is not surprising, since they possess the cause of light. I say this to thee, sweetest daughter, to make thee know the perfection of the unitive state, where the intelligence is carried away by the fire of My charity, which gives out supernatural light. The soul loves Me with this light because love follows understanding. The more it knows, the more it loves; and the more it loves, the more it knows. Understanding and love reciprocally nourish each other. It is by this light that the soul isolated from the body arrives at My eternal vision, where it tastes Me in truth. This is the most elevated state in which the soul in this mortal life can taste the life of the blessed. Often its union is so intimate that it scarcely knows whether it is with its body or without it. It has a foretaste of eternal life because it is strictly united to Me."

3. In common with the gift of understanding, and, indeed, with each and all of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, charity has three degrees,

corresponding to the three degrees which we are accustomed to attribute to those who commence, to those who advance, and to the perfect.

In the first degree the soul, filled with the gift of wisdom, learns to know divine things and to judge soundly. She conceives a repugnance for evil, and a relish and attraction for good, and she directs all her actions in a manner conformable to the divine will. This is the lot of all souls who are faithful to the practice of the commandments and the spirit of the counsels.

In the second degree the soul is drawn farther on the way of perfection. The exact observance of the law does not suffice for her. She lovingly observes also the counsels. She renounces and despises the most lawful satisfactions and pleasures of the senses and of the world to embrace a life of renunciation and mortification. The soul enlightened by the lights of contemplation, not only values the Cross of Jesus Christ, but she finds in it a spiritual sweetness and a peace that surpasses every feeling. It is thus that charity is felt by religious souls who give themselves to God generously and without division.

In the third degree the soul is transformed by the gift of wisdom; it is a life more angelic than human. To contemplation the most sublime, she joins a most perfect peace, a total conformity to the divine will, a holy ardor for immolation and sacrifice, in a word, the heroism of virtue. It is charity that presses. Nothing can arrest her generous outpourings; neither life, nor death, nor tribulation. The Cross alone is capable of satisfying souls on fire with love. Among all the saints whom we could cite let us be permitted to indicate the sublime effects of the gift of wisdom in the person of St. Dominic. This amiable saint shows us the perfection of charity followed by the perfection of sacrifice. To describe in two words this grand figure, let it suffice to say that he had learned all, as he tells us himself, "in the book of holy charity," and that his entire life was an ardent thirst for martyrdom. These are the characters of the gift of wisdom in its highest degree.

II

That we also should ardently desire the gift of wisdom cannot be doubted, since wisdom is inseparably united with divine charity, and

since this gift, being a participation in eternal wisdom, brings us such great benefits.

Blessed Henry Suso makes known to us the pious ardors of the lover of Eternal Wisdom. "Oh! if I could see her only once," he says, "if I obtained the grace of speaking to her, how happy would I esteem myself! Who must she be who speaks so eloquently of herself, and who promises so great goods to her adorers!" In the midst of his ardent longings Divine Wisdom appeared to him from afar, raised upon a pillar of clouds and upon a throne of ivory, with a majesty more brilliant than the morning, more dazzling than the sun. Her crown was eternity; her veil and her garment, felicity; her language, sweetness; and her embraces, abundance and the possession of all goods. She appeared at once distant and near; sublime and humble; evident and hidden; simple and at the same time incomprehensible; higher than the heights of heaven; deeper than the abysses of the sea. She was as a queen who reigned with power even to the ends of the earth and governed every creature with mildness. She was a mistress learned in all things, who smiled on him with grace and majesty, saying to him: "My son, give me thy

heart." He cast himself at her feet and gave her the most humble and loving thanks. Eternal Wisdom disappeared and left his heart full of celestial thoughts and enthusiasm. "Whence can come so much love, amiability, beauty, splendor, graces and charms?" he said. "Behold me then, Eternal Wisdom, entirely devoted to your love! Yes, I desire you, I choose you for the sovereign of my heart; and it is with the most lively sentiments of my soul that I attach myself to you. In you is united in an ineffable manner all that one can imagine charming, precious, amiable, perfect. You are an eternal river of delight, a fountain of blessings, an incomprehensible abyss of grace and bounty. In you I find riches, honors, virtue, power, glory; can I wish for anything else? Have I any other desire in this world? Oh! no; you alone, Divine Wisdom, shall be my beauty, my light, my treasure!" Happy the soul that thus desires Eternal Wisdom; the gift of wisdom will be given to her.

SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Gifts of Knowledge and Counsel

1. We go on to consider two other gifts of the Holy Ghost,—knowledge and counsel.

What is knowledge? It is a gift of the Holy Ghost that makes known to us all things, created and human, and causes us to judge them with certainty and facility in their relations to God. The gifts of wisdom and of knowledge possess something in common; both make known to us God and His creatures. Nevertheless, there is a notable difference between them. When the Holy Ghost makes us know and appreciate God through His creatures, it is the gift of knowledge; when He makes us know and judge creatures by the knowledge and taste we have of God, the first Principle of all things, it is the gift of wisdom.

Like the gift of understanding, knowledge links itself with faith in its relation to the moral conduct of man.

The first and principal effect of the gift of

knowledge is to make us know and discern with great certainty of judgment whatever we ought to refer to God. Grace is more perfect than nature and comes to our aid in those things in which we can be perfected by nature.

Now in order that our intelligence may adhere perfectly to the truths of faith, two things are necessary: first, to grasp firmly what is proposed to it to believe,—a thing that is proper to the gift of understanding: secondly, to form a certain and just judgment on all those things; it is to this that is referred the gift of knowledge. God judges with certitude of the truth without discussion, by simple intuition. Knowledge, which is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, does the same, because it is a participation in, and an image of, the divine knowledge.

The second effect of the gift of knowledge is to act on the will and direct it towards true good. The gift of knowledge, it is true, refers directly and principally to speculation, since by it we know the truth more exactly, profoundly, and certainly. It extends itself also to action, in that we are bound to regulate our conduct according to this same truth. It is thus that knowledge directs piety and is called

"the science of the saints." "The Lord conducted the just in the right ways and imparted to him the science of the saints." From the practical point of view, we can say that the gift of knowledge produces a very precious effect. It enlightens us and directs us in the holy ways of penance, by making known to us the nature and motives of this virtue, its multiple utility, and its essential qualities. It teaches us to know ourselves; to excite contrition in us; to confess our sins humbly and sincerely; to give to God a lawful satisfaction by all means in our power, such as fasts, austerities, vigils, and fervent prayers; and finally, to persevere in penitence till death.

2. There are three degrees of the gift of knowledge. The first degree, necessary for salvation, consists in acknowledging that creatures are nothing of themselves, and that we must not attach ourselves to them as to our last end, but use them solely in order to attain to God. The second degree, which is the portion of souls travelling on the way of perfection, consists in a great moderation, which causes us to use creatures with a true interior detachment. Here the soul begins to lift herself to God on the wings of a holy detachment

and a true spirit of penance, and also by the spectacle of nature. This is the knowledge recommended to the monks of the desert by St. Antony, which he himself had learned in the school of the Holy Ghost. A philosopher complained one day of being, as a solitary, deprived of the helps that are found in reading books. Antony thereupon showed him heaven and earth and said: "Behold, a book which holds for me the place of all others."

The third degree of the gift of knowledge is the property of the perfect: it is the spirit of renunciation pushed to the heroic practice of the counsels, and in reward for it, a sort of intuition of the symbolism of nature. St. Francis of Assisi appears to us as a finished type of this divine knowledge. He trampled under foot all earthly things to espouse holy poverty, and, according to pious authors, found himself in the midst of creation what Adam was in the midst of paradise. He called all creatures his brothers and sisters, and ascended by them to the bosom of God.

II

1. We now go on to consider the gift of counsel. What is counsel?

It is a gift of the Holy Ghost which makes us know and follow with docility and promptitude the will of God in all circumstances where we have need of special help. The gift of counsel corresponds to and supposes the virtue of prudence; but the gift superadds to the virtue a greater light and a new energy. Prudence suffices in ordinary cases, but in embarrassing and unexpected junctures the gift of counsel is necessary. The gifts of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, enlighten and direct us especially in a general way, while the gift of counsel makes us know and follow the best means of arriving at the end, here and now.

The gift of counsel exercises its action over our whole life. It makes known to us what we must do and what we must avoid; what we must say and what we must be silent about; what we must undertake, and what we must abandon. But it is especially in difficult circumstances of life that its help is made known to docile and faithful souls. Without the gift of counsel how could we avoid precipitation, rashness, negligence, inconstancy? How could we repress the prudence of the flesh, artifice craft, deception, excessive solicitude? The Holy Ghost by His divine light and His wise

and powerful direction removes all these obstacles and conducts us to our last end by sure and efficacious means. The gift of counsel is, then, the superior rule of the virtues; it moderates them; it directs them; it makes them produce perfect works worthy of eternal life.

It is above all in souls called to great perfection that the gift of counsel produces marvellous effects. The Holy Ghost unceasingly retains those souls in their interior by recollection. He moves them to act peaceably and with faith. He suggests to them at each instant the proper means of making progress in virtue. He enlightens and sustains them in their works. "Man in the aridities of the interior life," says Tauler, "is left entirely to himself; so much so, that he no longer knows anything of God, or of His graces and consolations, or of all that he acquired before now, all that is taken away from him, carried away or hidden, in such sort that he knows no longer where to go or whither to turn. In this condition he has a great need of the counsel of God to sustain himself and abandon himself to the divine will. It is extremely useful to him, and altogether necessary, to learn to resign himself and to die, to give himself up to the secret and terrible

judgment of God in this frightful privation of precious blessings in which consist all his joy and consolation." God will not abandon this afflicted soul, but by the gift of counsel will lead her in difficult ways of perfect abandonment to His will.

2. As in the other gifts of the Holy Ghost there are three degrees of the gift of counsel. In the first degree the gift of counsel makes us know and follow with promptitude and docility the will of God in matters of precept and strict obligation. In the second degree it inclines us to the generous practice of the evangelical counsels. In the third degree it causes us to undertake holy works with an extraordinary and truly heroic perfection. We can see, it seems to us, an effect of the gift of counsel of the second degree in the sacrifice which St. Catherine of Siena made at the age of twelve years by cutting her hair to assure her resolution of belonging solely and irrevocably to God. So also it is difficult not to see acts of the gift of counsel in a more elevated degree in the supernatural motion that urged this humble virgin to intervene in the most weighty affairs of the Church.

To reform the morals of a corrupt age, to

triumph over civil discords, to expose her life and even her honor, to exhort the peoples to undertake the crusade, to oppose herself to scism, to speak with a holy liberty to the powerful ones of the earth, and even to prelates of the Church, are not things that enter into the attributes of a Christian maiden. We must recognize in them, especially after so great success, the action of the gift of counsel in the highest degree.

Let us beg of God to confer on us also in large measure this gift of counsel, to conduct us in the right way amid the difficulties and embarrassments of life, and by His powerful light to show us the path that leads to perfection.

SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Gifts of Piety, Fortitude, and Fear

I

1. After having considered the gifts that perfect the intellect, we go on to study the gifts that perfect the will; namely, piety, fortitude, and fear.

And first, piety. This is a gift of the Holy Ghost that fills us with a truly filial affection towards God, our Father, and makes us accomplish with a holy eagerness and wholeheartedness all that pertains to the worship of God and the relief of the neighbor. The gift of piety corresponds to the virtue of piety, and piety, like religion, is a virtue annexed to justice. The gift of piety differs from the virtue of religion in this that the latter honors God as Creator and Sovereign Master, whilst the gift of the Holy Ghost leads us to honor Him as Father, according to the saying of the Apostle: "You have received the adoption of

children whereby we cry 'Abba, Father.'" What distinguishes the gift of piety from the virtue of the same name, is the particular motion of the Holy Ghost which leads the soul to perform greater and more perfect actions. There is also something more elevated and noble in this motive. Piety as a virtue has a human side: it looks to benefits received; whereas the gift of piety considers before all how God is worthy in Himself to be loved and served.

2. The effects of the gift of piety are very numerous and consoling. With regard to God, they are: lively sentiments of tenderness, confidence, and love, generous and even heroic resolutions, effusions full of sweetness, and a suavity all celestial. The soul, filled with a filial and absolute submission to the dispositions of divine providence, is ready to accept with love all it will please God to ordain. The gift of piety strives also after all that pertains to Him —His creatures glorified in Heaven, His creatures suffering in Purgatory and on earth, all the works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, all that can contribute to the glory of God and the good of His Church. Nothing is omitted, nothing neglected.

This filial devotion is universal. But it seems this is not enough: it must be manifested with promptitude and goodness. This last is the crowning act produced by the gift of piety. How could one nourish his soul with the divine word, meditate attentively on the life and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, have a tender devotion to Mary and the saints, practise works of mercy, without having great sentiments of confidence and love for God?

II

1. Fortitude is a gift of the Holy Ghost that imparts to us courage to undertake or to suffer great things for God, and enables us to accomplish or bear them with an unshakable firmness and confidence in spite of all obstacles. There is an analogy between the virtue of fortitude and the gift of fortitude. The latter gives to acts of generosity a greater perfection and pushes farther its victories. A new element is introduced into the struggle. It is God Himself who acts in us and with us by His Divine Spirit, and the soul, leaning solely on God, full of confidence in God alone, works prodigies.

2. The effects of the gift of fortitude are

interior or exterior. As to the interior, it is a vast field open to generosity and sacrifice, often even to heroism. These are incessant and victorious struggles against the solicitations of the devil, against self-love and self-seeking, against impatience. As to the exterior effects, they are new and striking triumphs won by the Holy Ghost against error and vice. Our poor body shares in the effects of fortitude, and, helped supernaturally, sets itself with ardor to the practices of mortification, and suffers the most cruel pains without weakening. The gift of fortitude is in truth the principle and the source of all things undertaken and suffered for God.

"O my friends," cries out Tauler, "how noble and eminent is this gift!" Here the Holy Ghost lifts man above even his infirmity and his nature. It is this divine fortitude that made the holy martyrs act and suffer death joyously for God. It is fortitude that renders man so magnanimous that for the love of God he would willingly accomplish alone the works of all men, and would suffer all adversities, like St. Paul, who said: "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." By it man fears neither fire, nor water, nor death, but says with

St. Paul: "I am certain that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor any other creature can separate me from the charity of God." By it man is so strong that not only would he not commit a mortal sin, but he would rather die than offend God by a deliberate venial sin. With this divine strength man can do marvellous things.

3. All that we have said of the degrees of the gift of counsel apply also to fortitude, for the two gifts are practised upon the same object. To the gift of counsel pertains the divine light that serves as guide; to the gift of fortitude, the prompt and ready energy of execution. In the first degree it is the efficacious performance of things of precept; in the second degree it is the practice of the counsels; in the third degree the soul takes a superhuman flight; she forgets herself, to see only God alone, in whom she places all her confidence and strength.

In this supreme degree we see humble virgins, weak children, face with joy the most frightful sufferings, and carry off the crown of martyrdom. We ought also to place, if not in the same rank at least in the same category, heroic acts of fortitude inspired and sustained

by the Holy Ghost, the struggles and combats of souls whom God calls to the highest perfection, and whom He causes to pass through the gulf of passive purification. Blessed Henry Suso, to whom these hard trials were not unknown, one day heard divine wisdom explain to him how the true servants of God suffer and feel not, so to speak, their sufferings, animated as they are by the gift of fortitude: "My servant must first of all love mortification and self-denial, and must die entirely to himself and all creatures. This degree of perfection is very rare, but he who has arrived at it, rapidly rises to God and is so transformed in his first origin, that he thinks of himself and of other creatures only in God. This gives birth in his soul to a love and a lively enjoyment of the works of God. Love and joy cause the soul to reign over the works of God, as if they were hers, and hence she can desire and obtain all that she wishes, since she appropriates to herself heaven, earth, and all things. Is it astonishing, then, that afflictions and crosses do not impress her as they impress those whose formal desire is not to suffer? The saints are not, more than other men, insensible to pain; but their soul is sheltered from every blow since she

seeks and loves only the Cross. Their body suffers, but their soul is intoxicated with God, and tastes an ineffable happiness in ecstasy. How, in the midst of this Divine Essence in which they are all transformed, can sadness and sorrow be felt? The love that animates them, causes them no longer to take sorrow for sorrow, affliction for affliction. They experience a profound and unalterable peace in God."

III

1. The last of the divine gifts is that of fear. This is a gift of the Holy Ghost that imparts to us a great facility in the practice of the filial respect and loving submission that we owe to God, as our Father, and removes us promptly from sin because it displeases Him. The gift of fear is the first step that we take in the formation of our spiritual edifice. It is "the beginning of wisdom." Indeed we begin to taste God when we begin to fear Him with that chaste and filial fear that proceeds from love. The gift of fear corresponds to hope and temperance: to temperance, because it causes us to avoid, in view of God, all the wanderings of our corrupt nature.

2. The effects of the gift of fear can be re-

duced to two,—a profound and filial respect for God, and an extreme horror of the least sin. This respect for God is universal and practical. Everywhere and always the soul, urged by the Divine Spirit, bows before the majestic and paternal authority of God, before His rights, His promises, His threats. It is also respect for the Church and for all holy things, respect for souls, creatures of God regenerated in the Holy Ghost, and co-heirs of Jesus Christ. A soul faithful to the gift of fear knows not that excessive and misplaced familiarity that stops all serious progress in the interior life, and sometimes goes to the most serious illusions in the reception of the Sacraments. Filial respect does not prevent confidence, nor the holy emotions of divine love. It only arrests presumption and irreverence. The gift of fear produces also an extreme horror of the smallest faults, accompanied with humility, vigilance, and a firm resolution of avoiding all the occasions of them.

"This fear," says Tauler, "is a strong wall, firm and assured, that preserves man from all weaknesses and obstacles. It makes us fly before the secret snares and ambushes that could hurt our souls. It acts as a wild animal or as a

game bird that one wishes to capture, and flies with rapidity before those who seek to approach it. Just as God has given this instinct to creatures deprived of reason, so the Holy Ghost gives this divine fear to all that are His, in order that they may avoid all that for them might be an obstacle. The nobility and dignity to which the Holy Ghost has raised them, preserves them from the world, from the devil, from the man himself, and generally from all things that could make them lose peace and the interior repose of the soul, which is truly the house of God. Divine fear avoids further still all those expedients by which perfidious nature tries to arrest us in good. It avoids those things, because 'it is the beginning of wisdom.' "

3. There are three degrees in the gift of fear as in all the other gifts of the Holy Ghost, according as the divine motion carries us to things of precept, or of counsel, or of heroism. We can place in the second degree the examples of a great number of holy persons who, in the midst of the curiosities of a great city, or in presence of a speaker, so guard modesty of the eyes that they absolutely see nothing and remark nothing. In the highest degree we will

cite St. Rose of Lima. Her mother, proud of her beauty, wished to introduce her to the world. The angelic virgin understood the dangers of it. One day she crushed her foot under a great stone. On another occasion she burned her two feet by placing them on a hot grate. Many times she rubbed her eyelids with pepper, her face and hands with corrosive powder. By these means and many others not less extraordinary, which a motion of the Holy Ghost could alone authorize, St. Rose avoided the dangers of the world and kept her soul pure and untouched for her Divine Spouse.

Let us follow her example and that of all the saints by valuing this gift of holy fear, praying for it, and practising it with all our might: it will be for us "the beginning of wisdom," the refuge that preserves us from the commission of sin, a powerful stimulus to the practice of all virtues.

EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Fruits of the Holy Ghost and the Beatitudes

I

We have come to-day to the last conference that has reference to the sources of the spiritual life, namely, the Fruits of the Holy Ghost, and the Beatitudes. I join these two subjects, because they have intimate relations with each other, and both proceed from the same divine source, the Spirit of goodness and love.

Let me speak first of the Fruits. By the Fruits of the Holy Ghost we understand all virtuous acts arrived at a certain perfection and in which man takes delight. It is not yet the perfect joy of the last end; but it is its commencement in a relative enjoyment. The Fruits, in the plan that we have laid out for ourselves, come before the Beatitudes, because these in a way are more complete. Indeed the Fruits differ from the Beatitudes in this, that

the name of Beatitudes is attributed only to perfect acts, or, at least, to acts fulfilled in a more perfect manner; whilst this is not absolutely necessary for the simple fruits of the Holy Ghost. Whence it follows that the Beatitudes can be called the Fruits of the Holy Ghost, and that the Fruits of the Holy Ghost are not Beatitudes. The Fruits are not, then, simple virtuous acts, but virtuous acts so complete as to fill the soul with ineffable delight.

As to the Fruits of the Holy Ghost, we can say in general that there are as many as there are possible virtuous acts. All the acts of virtues and of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are contained in the twelve Fruits enumerated by St. Paul; charity, joy, peace, patience, longanimity, goodness, benevolence, meekness, faith, modesty, continency, and chastity. Charity, in which the Holy Ghost gives Himself specially to us, is the first in rank, because it is the image of divine love and the source of all the other Fruits. In fact *charity* necessarily produces in us *joy;* for he who loves, rejoices in his union with the object loved. The perfection of joy is a *peace* that nothing disturbs and that rests in the possession of God. Is this peace menaced by some evil? Charity is shown by *patience.*

Does it suffer some delay in the goods that it expects? It lightens the day by *longanimity.*

Charity in regard to the neighbor is *goodness* which tries to do good: *benignity* which performs it: it is *meekness* that bears the evils the neighbor tries to do us, and that represses anger: it is good faith or *fidelity,* simple and candid, without ruse or artifice.

Finally, with regard to ourselves, charity appears in *modesty,* which rules our external conduct; in *continence,* which separates us from permitted pleasures; in *chastity,* which allows us not to enjoy forbidden pleasures. Thus we see the acts of the virtues and of the Gifts produce delicious Fruits. It is the Holy Ghost, the active and fecund principle of the supernatural life, that forms and develops them in us even to full and entire maturity.

II

1. Let us finally speak of the Beatitudes. We comprise under this name the acts of perfect virtues, and especially the acts of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which lead us to our last end. We call them Beatitudes by metonymy, because they are the cause and the pledge of eternal felicity. These acts are themselves ac-

companied by a celestial consolation, and from this point of view we can say that it is already a true felicity. We count eight Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, meekness, tears, a thirst after justice, mercy, purity of heart, love of peace, persecutions undergone for justice' sake. The first seven correspond to the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost: the last is as a résumé of the others.

In attributing to the Beatitudes the acts of perfect virtues and of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost we do not intend to restrain them in an absolute manner to things of counsel, or heroic things. We have already said that the acts of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost can take place even in that which concerns common things and those of precept, when the divine will demands of us a greater promptitude and a more perfect docility, and when our weakness demands a more elevated principle of action. The Beatitudes comprise the acts of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in all their extent, even to the first degree, *in ordine ad beatitudinem;* that is to say, in as far as those acts are the cause, the pledge, and a sort of commencement of eternal beatitude. By this title those who use riches with moderation can possess to a cer-

tain degree the first beatitude, poverty of spirit, and those who bear generously the ordinary persecutions and temptations of life, especially when they are of long duration, can also possess the eighth Beatitude, which consists in bearing suffering for justice' sake.

2. As to the relations that unite the Beatitudes to the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, authors have considered two things. Some look to the conformity of objects; while others prefer to see only the motives. St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, has taken this latter step. These are, according to the Angelic Doctor, the relations we can observe between the Beatitudes and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

To the gift of understanding corresponds the sixth beatitude: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." To the gift of knowledge the third beatitude: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." To the gift of wisdom, the seventh beatitude: "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." To the gift of counsel, the fifth beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." To the gift of piety, the second beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."

To the gift of fortitude, the fourth beatitude: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled." To the gift of fear, the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall possess the kingdom of heaven." The eighth beatitude, being the confirmation and manifestation of the previous seven, refers to the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which the application is made to each of the Beatitudes.

3. Such are the marvellous operations of the Holy Ghost in the soul. The relations that we have established between the Gifts and the Beatitudes are founded on serious motives, but they are not so exclusive that one cannot admit the simultaneous influence of many Gifts of the Holy Ghost in a single Beatitude. Indeed, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are inseparably bound up and united with charity. If the one or the other of those divine motions is more particularly signalized on one point by reason of the end to be attained, it is not without the concurrence of the other Gifts that accompany it. It can happen, then, that two or more Gifts of the Holy Ghost may be at the same time the principles of action of a single Beatitude, and that two or more Beatitudes

may appear to refer to a single Gift of the Holy Ghost.

In the last analysis, these phenomena of the interior life are the secret of God. Let it suffice for us to know that there is no Beatitude without a gift of the Holy Ghost as the principle of the acts that it produces.

Supplement

As these books will be largely in the hands of priests, who of all are called to the practice of the interior life, and whose office it is moreover to be the instructors of others, I take the liberty of adding a short supplement referring directly to the priestly character and office.

FIRST CONFERENCE

The Holiness Required in Priests. (I)

"I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called . . . Put off, according to former conversation, the old man who is corrupted according to the desire of error.

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

"And put on the new man, who according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth."—Eph. IV, 22–24.

I

1. The Apostle devotes the last three chapters of his Epistle to the Ephesians to a detailed exhortation to the practice of various virtues. And this, in order that, as he says, "they may walk in a manner worthy of the vocation to which they are called"—the high vocation of being admitted as members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ. And, in general, they are to "put off the old man"—the cor-

rupt life and manners of paganism in which they lived before their call to the Christian religion.

They are to "be renewed in the spirit of their mind," or, as another rendering has it, "in the interior of their heart."

And, lastly, they are "to put on the new man," the spirit of Jesus Christ, "who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth"; that is to say, in true holiness.

They are to aspire after "true holiness," not, mark you, the legal holiness of the synagogue, or the "imputed holiness" of Protestant belief.

The Apostle exhorts to this threefold renewal the Ephesians newly converted to the Christian religion.

And if he looks for this threefold renewal in the neophytes of Ephesus on the ground of their call to the Christian religion, how proper, dear Fathers, that I apply this threefold exhortation, aye, and in a more insistent manner, to you, especially in those privileged days when you shall have leisure to reflect profoundly on the holiness of the priestly state. For the character of him who is admitted to a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ is as far removed from that of the ordinary Christian, as is

the character of the believer from that of the pagan.

I, therefore, beseech you, dearly beloved, that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called,—the sublime vocation of the Christian priesthood.

2. And, first of all, you are to put off the old man; yes, the old man; for there are two men in us. There is the old Adam of our corrupt nature, with its pride and sensuality and other evil propensities which continually resist the calls of grace. These evil leanings of your nature you must overcome by self-renunciation and penance, according to the condition laid down by our Lord Himself: "If anyone will come after Me, let him renounce himself."

Nor are you as priests to give yourselves to vulgar gratifications, natural and innocent though they may be, in which the ordinary faithful indulge. "For, no man," as the Apostle says, "enlisting in the military service of his prince occupies himself with the avocations of civil life," but is wholly taken up with the pursuits of his profession. People of the world may without offense pass an idle hour in card-playing and gambling in a moderate way, in hunting, and so forth. This is their method of

life, for, ordinarily they are not called to the practice of very high virtue, and they are saved by the observance of the Commandments.

A priest, on the contrary, is bound to aspire after the perfection of the priesthood. He has enlisted in a special way in the militia of Jesus Christ. His life is to be absorbed in priestly pursuits and studies. Nor are you permitted to fritter away your time in useless and desultory reading. How many priests squander the best hours of the day in pouring over the sporting columns of the newspaper and useless trash to be found in the popular magazines, when they ordinarily find so little time for prayer and for the austere studies of their profession. Such indulgence is, as the mystic authors teach, the luxury of the mind, and a deliberate wastage of the time and gifts bestowed so liberally upon them by the Almighty.

And here, I would remind you of a thing that is sometimes forgotten, and it is, that the first bearers of the honor of the priesthood were all religious; for, all the Apostles professed in their entirety the Gospel counsels which are the essential conditions of the religious state.

3. Hence, further, the Apostle says unto you in the words of my text, "be you renewed

in the interior of your heart." Not only must you dissociate yourselves from the ways of people of the world, even exemplary Catholics, who spend a good part of their time in social and worldly joys, but you must practise an interior renewal which will turn you to the cultivation of priestly ways and virtues.

Now, one of the graces we have most need of in order that we may conduct ourselves in all things as the faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, is the ecclesiastical spirit. As it is easy to lose it amid the cares and distractions of the world, we cannot repeat too often: "Be renewed in the interior of your heart." To establish this renewal with the greater facility and success let us learn what the ecclesiastical spirit consists in.

It is an abundant participation in the spirit of Jesus Christ Himself whose ministers we are. "We have not received the spirit of this world," says St. Paul, "but the spirit which is of God." (I Cor. ii, 12.) It is a gift of God which inspires us with the love of eccelesiastical functions, and which renders us capable of exercising them in a becoming manner. Hence, you shall know whether you have the ecclesiastical spirit by these two signs: first, if you

exercise with pleasure the functions of this state; and, second, if you are capable of acquitting yourself well of them.

4. An ecclesiastic, in order to have the spirit of his state, ought to have a particular attraction for the virtues that most of all belong to it —a perfect piety, an angelic purity, an ardent zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, a great love for the Church, a singular love for prayer, for study, for labor. He ought to bear in all places the marks of his dignity. His exterior, his carriage, his garments, ought to be such as the Church prescribes. He ought to love the functions of his state of life, to feel a joy in exercising them all indifferently, even the lesser ones, or those which might appear the lowest. What do I say—the lesser and the lowest? There is not one of them which is not infinitely lifted above what we deserve. This is the ideal the saints had of them.

When St. Cyprian was consecrated to the service of the Lord, as St. Gregory Nazianzan tells us, he asked to be permitted to sweep the Church, and to be appointed to the lowest functions of the ministry.

We read in the letters of this illustrious martyr that the holy confessors, after having

sustained rude combats for the defense of the faith, held it an honor to exercise the offices of the Church which had the least distinction. This holy doctor, speaking of Aurelius, who had suffered for the faith, avows that he was worthy of the highest distinction in the Church. Nevertheless, he could not dissemble that the degree of lector was an abundant reward of his combats. Speaking of him, the holy doctor says: "Nothing was more proper and more becoming the voice of him who so gloriously confessed God, than to make the divine truths resound. He spoke with a courage inflamed with the holy desire to suffer martyrdom: he will announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which makes martyrs. When he was on the rack he was admired by the multitude and regarded as a miracle of constancy. His brethren will now be filled with joy at seeing and hearing him, when from the sacred pulpit he will announce the holy truths which ought to be the rule of our conduct."

5. In order to have the ecclesiastical spirit, it does not suffice to have a love for the functions of this state; we must, moreover, have the talents and the dispositions for discharging them well.

When God calls a man to any condition, and, above all, to the ecclesiastical state, He fills him with His spirit; and the characteristic of this spirit is to render men capable of exercising the functions of the state to which they are called. Thus we read that when God chose Beseleel and Ooliab to construct the tabernacle, He filled them with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, for all the works to which He had resolved to apply them. St. Augustine maintains that what is said of Beseleel and Ooliab ought to be referred to the great truths denoted by the tabernacle, rather than to the tabernacle itself, which was only the figure; that is to say, that God wished to teach us by this figure that when He should call in the law of grace, ministers for His Church, He would fill them with wisdom and understanding to discharge well the ecclesiastical functions.

II

1. Behold, what is the ecclesiastical spirit. See now whether you have received it, at least in some degree. If God has given it to you, have you preserved it, according to the words of the Apostle: "Extinguish not the spirit." (Thess. v. 19.)

Examine yourself on this point seriously and before God. Have you preserved, and do you ordinarily possess, the spirit of the true priest? Have you the perfect piety of the fervent priest? Do you practise angelic chastity? Do you feel yourself animated with an ardent zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls? Do you cultivate a singular love for prayer, for study, for labor?

Alas, how much it is to be feared lest this spirit of the priesthood be extinguished in you, since in the world you meet opposition to it everywhere.

Take then to-day some measures to renew it. Here are one or two that are very useful. First, separate yourself from the spirit of the world, which is entirely opposed to that of Jesus Christ. "You are not of this world," says our Lord to us, in the persons of His disciples; "I have chosen you and separated you from this world." This choice and this separation oblige us not to love what the world loves. The world loves only voluptousness and pleasures; it seeks only honors and money. A good ecclesiastic ought to set his heart on none of these. All that ought to occupy him is told him in what St. Paul says to Timothy: "Be thou vigilant; labor

in all things; do the work of an evangelist; fulfill thy ministry; be sober." *"Sobrius esto."* Heed well this advice. An ecclesiastic ought to be sober in all things—in his repasts, in his recreations, in his conversations; sober in speaking, sober in using the goods and comforts that God accords to our weakness. Oh! how happy should we be if we found ourselves in the same dispositions, in regard to the goods of this world, as Pope Eugenius did, to whom St. Bernard renders this testimony: "I have nothing to say to you touching avarice; for I am aware that you have no more esteem for money than for straw."

A minister of the Lord ought finally to be sober in regard to the employments and charges that are offered him, not seeking them with eagerness, and not refusing them with too much obstinacy; but following this beautiful maxim of St. Augustine: *"Vos exhortamur ut, si quam operam vestra mater ecclesia desideravit, nec elatione avida suscipiatis, nec blandiente desidia respuatis."* "We entreat you, if your mother, the Church desires you to undertake for her any work, that you neither take it up with a greedy elation, nor refuse it through

a soothing idleness." Enter into these sentiments if you wish to renew in yourselves the ecclesiastical spirit.

2. A second means, which will be not less useful to you to this effect, is the practice of retreat one day in the month, in addition to some consecutive days, such as this at the end of the year. This is what the greatest saints have taught us by their example.

They did not excuse themselves from giving some time to the laboring for this interior renewal because of the crowd of affairs which the needs of the Church forced them to take on themselves. On the contrary, it was that which obliged them to consecrate some days to retreat in order to examine themselves seriously, and to purify themselves from the faults they had committed in the commerce which charity obliged them to have with the world, to repair the negligence of other times, and to take for the future strong resolutions to act with more purity and zeal.

Imitate them; and often when celebrating the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, ask of Jesus Christ by the merits of His hidden life, the mystery of which is represented to you in that

of the Eucharist, that He will accord you the grace of retiring from time to time to think more seriously of yourselves.

Fear not that you will lose time in this retreat. This leisure will be for you a great affair if you occupy yourselves in it as you ought for the affair of your salvation: "Let no one grudge me my leisure," says St. Augustine, "because my leisure has a great purpose."

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Holiness Required in Priests. (II)

"Put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth."—(*Eph. iv. 24.*)

I

1. The Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians would have the newly baptized Christians not only put off the old man, the corrupted manners and conversation to which they were addicted as pagans, and be renewed in the interior of their hearts: he would have them, moreover, put on the new man, who, according to God, *i. e.,* in conformity with God's will, is created in justice and true holiness.

What is this holiness of which the Apostle speaks?

Holiness, according to St. Thomas, bespeaks two things, cleanness and firmness; cleanness in the mind; firmness in the will; cleanness in

this, that the mind be abstracted from worldly things so that it may be applied to God, the Supreme Being; because the human mind, being created primarily for the contemplation of God, is soiled by contact with inferior things, just as silver is soiled by mixture with lead. Firmness in this, that the will be attached to God as its first beginning and its last end. Holiness, therefore, connotes the mind and will of man as attaching themselves and all their acts to God. As such it differs in nothing from religion except that it is more general in its application; for religion is so called, in as much as it offers to God a due worship; but holiness is so called, in as much as a man offers to God not only those works which pertain to the divine worship, but also those that come from the other virtues.

We priests are called to the cultivation of a special holiness. "Be ye perfect," says Jesus Christ to the first priests. "Be ye holy, as I am holy," says God to Moses. Now, can we, looking over our past lives, say that we have put on this new man, who, as God tells us, is created in justice and true holiness? or, can we not with reason say of many ecclesiastics what St. Bernard said of certain religious, that they have

only the habit and the externals of their profession, without its spirit? They content themselves with having the beard shaved, with wearing the Roman collar and the cassock, and with practising some exercises of piety; but at bottom they have not that true sanctity which the holiness of our state demands, and to which St. Paul invites us by these words, which are so familiar to us: "Put on the new man, who was created by God in justice and true holiness." We shall make, then, a very useful meditation if we consider the reasons which oblige priests of the New Law to be holy; it is sufficient to instruct us to compare them to those of the Old.

Behold, then, what God said to Moses: "Speak to the priests, children of Aaron, and thou shalt say to them. . . . They shall be holy to their God, and shall not profane His name; for, they offer the burnt offering of the Lord, and the bread of their God, and therefore they shall be holy. And they offer the loaves of proposition. Let them therefore be holy, because I am also holy, the Lord who sanctify them." (Lev. xxi, 6–8.)

Remark how in these few words the Lord says three times that His ministers should be

holy. Conclude from this what priests of the New Law ought to be, they whose ministry is not simply to offer to God incense and bread, but the Holy of holies, Him who is the Victim of propitiation for the salvation of the world; those who discharge the ministry of angels; that is to say, which belongs to angels rather than to men, as St. Chrysostom renders it: "Let them therefore be holy, because I am also holy, the Lord who sanctify them."

2. Everything is holy in a minister of the Church; his character is holy, his functions are holy. It is then very just that his life be holy also. What is a priest? He is a vicar of Jesus Christ. "He left priests vicars of Himself," says the Council of Trent (Sess. 15, c. 5); that is to say, that a priest holds the place of Jesus on earth, and he ought to represent Him in his whole conduct.

Where find this image and this representation of Jesus Christ in a priest if he is not holy? Where find Jesus Christ zealous for the glory of His Father? Jesus Christ poor? Jesus Christ full of wisdom? Jesus Christ passing His life in labors and sufferings, in a priest vicious and idle?

We were constituted vicars of Jesus Christ

at the same time that we were vested with the character of priests. We ought to represent Him not only in the Church, in the confessional, at the altar, but moreover in the world and before the eyes of all men, by the conformity of our life with His. Behold how far our holiness ought to go. Hence, if we have only a common virtue, we are not worthy vicars of Jesus Christ. "You see that in priests nothing common is looked for," says St. Ambrose, "for how can they be distinguished from the people who have no qualities to mark them off from the people?"

Reflect well on this, and weep over the little attention you have paid to the holiness of your state.

II

1. Consider in what this holiness consists. It is, first, in bringing to the priesthood holiness of life, or at least in having made sufficient reparation for the faults of youth by a sincere penance. St. Paul, speaking of deacons, says that they ought to be well proved beforehand, and then admitted to the sacred ministry if they are found not guilty of any crime. (1. Tim. iii,–10.)

The Church has always followed this doctrine of the Apostles. She wishes that her ministers be proved; that is to say, according to the explanation of a great pope, that those only are to be received to orders who have been duly examined, and who have shown by the holiness of their life and by the practice of virtue that they have striven to render themselves worthy of the rank to which they have been raised. "Let no cleric be ordained till he be proved either by an examination before the bishop or by the testimony of the people." (Ep. Nichol. ad Cler., c. 5.) The same Pope says expressly that he meant to speak of a long examination. There should be an examination where the whole course of the life of the subject is considered with care; because, often in probing deeper, one discovers disorders in a life that appeared at first innocent.

In those examinations the Church laid aside no precaution. The people even were consulted, as St. Cyprian testifies in one of his epistles.

2. When we are engaged in it and when the Church has chosen to place us in the ranks of her ministers, we must maintain ourselves with firmness in the state we have embraced. You

are honored with the ecclesiastical character, the holiest character that has ever been, says St. Ambrose, and, therefore, you are obliged to live now more holily than you ever lived before. Your actions must respond to the holiness of your name and profession.

Be not content to avoid great faults. Avoid also the lesser, which, as the Council of Trent says, are always important in those who by their state are obliged to live in an eminent holiness. (Sess. 22, c. i, *de Reform.*)

Regulate yourself in such a manner that no one can remark anything in you which does not inspire love for religion, and which does not show that you are entirely penetrated with the greatness of your ministry, and occupied with sanctifying yourself and laboring for the sanctification of others.

3. Ecclesiastical holiness demands, finally, that we should propose to ourselves unceasingly to make new progress in virtue. "If you say: 'I have done enough,' you are a lost man," says St. Augustine. (Serm. 109, *de Verb. Apost.*) This maxim applies above all to ecclesiastics, who by their state are obliged to so great a perfection. Hence, listen not to those

who say to you, that you can rest yourself, and that you have done enough, but listen rather to him who says to you:
"Arise, for you have yet a great way to go." (3 Kings i, 7.)

4. Examine yourselves on these three sorts of holiness with which the ecclesiastical state ought to be accompanied. What holiness had you when you entered the clerical state? "Let clerics be holy," says St. Jerome to Rusticus. "So live, therefore, that you soil not your youth by any stain; so that you may ascend to the altar as a virgin from her couch." Is it thus that you have entered the sanctuary? Since you have become an ecclesiastic, in what holiness have you lived? Finally, have you progressed; or rather, have you not become relaxed? Ah, here is the point for daily reflection, contrition, resolutions, and actions. Since you must walk with great courage in the way of perfection fortify yourselves with that divine nourishment which you received at the altar, and try to convince yourselves of this truth, enunciated by St. Jerome: Nothing contributes more to the contempt of the Church than to see that lay people are holier and lead better lives than ecclesiastics.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Learning Required in Priests. (I)

I

1. The subject that I have to propose for your consideration to-day is one of a special character. It is a very important one, however, and one that should be deeply pondered over by those called to the ecclesiastical state. That subject is the knowledge required in priests; and hence, the zeal for study those who have been raised to that state, and those who are preparing for it, ought to have.

But at the outset, would it not appear like showing light to the sun, to try and prove to priests the necessity of zeal for the acquirement of ecclesiastical knowledge? For have not priests always been recognized as one of the most learned bodies in the world? Have not priests distinguished themselves in every department of learning? And is it not one of the tests of our vocation that we be possessed of superior talents, and that we have an aptitude

and a zeal for the acquirement of knowledge?

All this is true, and it would seem superfluous to enter into a detail of proofs which establish the necessity you have of zeal for learning.

However, laying aside these considerations, I desire as the subject is of such supreme importance, to lay before you some reflections with regard to the necessity of knowledge in those who are called to the ecclesiastical state.

And I say that it is only necessary to consider the state, the dignity, the rank, the character and destination of a minister of the Church, to establish this necessity. He is mediator, guide, physician, judge, and teacher of the people. He is called "the light of the world," "the salt of the earth," "the angel of the Lord of Hosts." What lights, what knowledge are there not required in one who is called on to fulfill qualities so high and charges so tremendous? And if he does not respond with all his abilities to so high and holy a vocation, may that not be said of him which a holy Doctor said of those who possess dignities and live lives unworthy of them, that they cast precious stones into the mire? Let us consider one by one the demands that those high qualities make on him that is called to them.

A mediator cannot succeed in his enterprise if he does not know perfectly the means to be employed to bring about the union and the peace for which he labors. He must of necessity enter into the humors, the mind, the inclinations of those whom he wishes to unite. He must know how to take the most just measures for the accomplishment of his object, and this especially when he engages in affairs of great consequence, and ones that present great difficulties.

Now, what is the mediation with which priests are charged? Is it not to conciliate God with sinners? What enterprise is more difficult? The priest must overthrow the wall of division that separates them; that is, he must destroy the monster, mortal sin. He must introduce the life of grace into a soul in which the darkness of hell reigned supreme before.

Do we not see that temporal sovereigns, when they desire to arrange certain affairs which they regard as important, choose for this purpose out of an infinite number of persons of merit, the most accomplished subject they can find?

Ah, brethren, what proportion between the most important state negotiations and those

with which priests are charged?—to wrench the arms from the almighty hands of the God of vengeance—to arrest the strokes of His anger —to change the will of the impious, and to unite heaven and earth: that is, sinful man with God, establishing between them a profound peace and a perfect friendship after a war so cruel and a hatred so bitter.

2. The quality of guide no less demands knowledge. It is evident that in order to be able to lead anyone, it is necessary to know the way: otherwise, both guide and guided fall into the ditch. But what is the way by which the priest is to lead men? Is it not by the way of God's commandments—the paths of justice and of truth—the road to salvation and perfection—the path which the Saviour has marked out for us in ascending to Calvary, and from Calvary to the glory of the Father?

It is a way where there are many obstacles to avoid, many precipices to fear, many enemies to combat, many temptations to surmount. It is that way which Jesus Christ calls straight, and which none can traverse without crucifying his flesh with its concupiscences, without trampling the world with its maxims under foot.

What discernment is there not required in order not to be deceived in the choice of this narrow way? It is one, moreover, amid many paths of error, the more dangerous as they appear the more secure to men who are led by false lights, and with regard to which the most enlightened are only too often deceived. Those usages so long established in the world, and which are, nevertheless, only detestable abuses—those customs so authorized, but which can never prescribe against God's law—those examples so pernicious—those prejudices which have such power over minds; those, I say, are so many ways not only dangerous, but evidently bad; and yet, people in the world rush blindly into them, walk in them without scruple, and by them arrive heedlessly at eternal death.

But what is most frightful is that sinners who walk in those evil ways with such blindness and passion, because they appear agreeable and easy, when they meet with guides who wish to withdraw them from them, do all in their power to draw them also into them. And, would to God they had never succeeded in so evil an enterprise!

Finally, that which renders the function of

guide in the way of salvation still more difficult is, that the elect are to be led to their end by different ways. We must have regard to many different things—to temperaments, to employments, to genius, to talents, to dispositions.

3. The function of teacher, which a priest is called on to discharge, and which is inseparable from his state, is no whit easier to fulfill. If those who occupy themselves entirely in the study of a science or an art, although it be not very difficult, confess, nevertheless, that they always find something new in it; if the higher arts and sciences are being perfected more and more from age to age, and will go on progressing to the end of time; what are we to judge of the "art of arts," of that sublime science where the greatest geniuses after a study extending over the longest life only come to discover their ignorance of it?

What an abyss, in fact, is scholastic theology! What an inexhaustible source of difficulties, moral theology! What a vast field of research, positive theology, which embraces the knowledge of holy Scripture, tradition, ecclesiastical and civil law, and the rules that regulate the discernment of lawfully established

custom from those that are an abuse! All these have respect to the pulpit and to the sacred tribunal. I cannot pass over the accurate knowledge required for the proper administration of the Sacraments, or for the performance of other ecclesiastical functions; and, yet, how many priests who, having given up the study of ecclesiastical sciences, blunder in the performance of those high functions!

A priest, I say, cannot in conscience remain wilfully ignorant of any one of these branches of knowledge, (I speak now only of that which is essential to his ministry), without falling into very considerable faults and blunders.

II

1. But, one might ask, how are we to acquire a knowledge of so many different things, and with study so prodigious? This is a very natural cause of anxiety, since we are obliged to spare nothing that we may acquire a knowledge of things that we are bound to know.

Well, I will tell you. By continued and persevering study. By retirement and separation from the world. By the careful management of our time that we may not lose a moment. By consultation with humility and submission

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with those who are more learned than ourselves. By distrust of our own lights—these are means that we ought to employ to get instructed, and to act otherwise is to draw upon ourselves the curse which is pronounced against ignorant priests who thus render themselves accountable for all the consequences of their ignorance.

Someone will say, perhaps, that this would be a very painful labor, and an occupation very wearisome; that it would be to bury one's self alive in a sad retirement, and to sacrifice the chief enjoyments of life. That may be true. But let us remember that the ecclesiastical state is a state of labor, mortification, and suffering. We have embraced it willfully. We ought to have known the sacrifice which the adoption of this state entails.

2. But are we more privileged than the rest of men? Consider the toil and care of so many people in the world, the hard and almost insupportable life of so many craftsmen and laborers. Lastly, shall we not do for Heaven what people do every day for vanity and curiosity? How many are there who toil on from year's end to year's end in their study in order to acquire a vain reputation for learning! They

forego all the pleasures of life; they condemn themselves to perpetual solitude; they neglect their property and families.

And do not the immense treasures of eternity and the immense weight of glory which God prepares for laborious priests—the crown of immortality; do not all these, I say, deserve as much from us as human glory and the other earthly vanities deserve from worldlings? See the example of great churchmen, such as a Bossuet or a Cardinal Wiseman, who produced their great works by utilizing scraps of time while waiting for a stage coach, on a journey, or in a public hostelry, time that others waste in insipid talk or harmful indulgence. We priests must then be ever up and doing in order to perfect ourselves in knowledge for the proper discharge of the great work of our ministry. Let the injunction of St. Edmond of Canterbury be ever in our heart and on our lips: "Live as if you were to die tomorrow; work as if you were to live for ever," in Jesus Christ our Lord.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Learning Required in Priests. (II)

I

1. Priests are constituted judges to pronounce sentence of life or death; nay, of life or death eternal—sentence which regards the salvation or damnation of souls.

In order to pronounce a definitive sentence on which depends the allotment of a considerable sum of money, the opinions of several judges are consulted. They give judgment only after a long examination, after having heard many times the claims of the parties concerned, and these put forward by the ablest lawyers, after having read and examined with care the titles and documents in the possession of the several parties, after having taken the advice of the best legal authorities and conferred together—after having taken all these measures to secure a just distribution, at last only the majority of votes decides.

How many precautions over a little tem-

poral good; whilst a priest is obliged to pronounce alone, sentences which consign to heaven or to hell—to pronounce, sometimes, a large number in a short space of time, and with scarcely any leisure to reflect seriously on what he does, surrounded by a crowd of people with dispositions only too doubtful. Tell me, is this thought not capable of striking terror into the soul of a confessor the most intrepid; or, rather, the least sensible of the danger of his ministry?

2. Finally, priests as physicians of souls ought have great knowledge, lest they kill instead of cure, and lead into the abyss of perdition those who address themselves to them, instead of withdrawing from it those who have the misfortune of tending there. They ought to know and distinguish the different maladies of souls, their sources, their principles, their consequences, and their effects.

The art of curing the body is very difficult, and the ablest in the profession of medicine acknowledge that what they are ignorant of in this great art far surpasses what they know; because the human body is a marvel of divine workmanship, and there are besides, almost as many different temperaments as there are different persons.

Now, are we not obliged to agree that by how much the more excellent is the soul than the body, by so much the more difficult is it to cure the former, than the latter? Be not surprised then, if the Church demands with so much rigor, knowledge in her ministers; if she has always regarded ignorance as an irregularity of divine and ecclesiastical right; if the Fathers of the Church call ignorant priests monsters, and objects of horror; if the people themselves have such contempt for them; and if the Holy Scriptures load them with curses; "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee that thou shalt not do the office of the priesthood to me. And there shall be like people, like priest; and I will visit their ways upon them, as I will repay them their devices." —(Osee iv, 6–9.)

II

1. I could, if I did not fear to abuse your patience, enter upon the detail of the sad consequences of ignorance in priests. How do people ordinarily regard an ignorant priest? Is he not an object of contempt to his fellow-priests, and the subject of ridicule and raillery to the people? This ignorance leads him to an

irregular life, because finding no taste for study, he throws himself into company and amusements unbecoming his state. An ignorant priest renders himself guilty of a prodigious number of faults in his ministry, and thereby treasures up for himself wrath against the day of wrath. He falls insensibly into a frightful disgust for spiritual things; and, lastly, he comes to a deplorable state of blindness and hardness of heart, because these are the natural consequences of willful ignorance of one's duties. He gives loose reins to his passions. Conscience becomes dumb and he finds himself without fear at the gate of impenitence.

But, at the hour of death, what surprise; or, rather, what despair for the unfortunate priest whom ignorance shall have conducted to the abyss of eternal misery! What answer will he give when he sees in his own person the accomplishment of the terrible threat which the Lord has made in Holy Scriptures: "because thou hast repelled knowledge, I will repel thee."

2. Let us fear such evils, and in order that we may avoid them, let us apply ourselves seriously to acquire the knowledge becoming our state. And that we may animate ourselves

with the greater earnestness in the prosecution of our holy study, let us recall the magnificent promises which the Almighty will accomplish in future ages, of causing "to shine in heaven as stars of ravishing beauty, those who shall have enlightened the neighbor with the light of their counsels"; and that of the Apostle who says that, "by a little labor here, we shall merit to enjoy eternally the immense weight of glory of the elect."

In this life even do we not find greater satisfaction in reading and study; in listening to the sacred authors who speak to us an admirable, though silent language, than in mingling in the tumult of the world, and in listening to so many vaporings of persons who never honor us less than when they see us too often; or, rather, who despise us to our face, when we make ourselves too familiar with them?

But, as knowledge without charity puffeth up, and as nothing is more dangerous than knowledge badly employed, let us render ourselves holy, useful, and edifying, that we may taste the precious fruits of it in the Kingdom of Heaven.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

Duties of Pastors. (I)

"You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go, and should bring forth fruit, and your fruit should remain; that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you."—(John xv, 16.)

I

1. Thus spoke our Lord to His disciples, and in doing so He would remind them that their present privileged condition was not the result of any past merits of theirs, or of their own choice or election. It came about solely through His exceeding goodness and mercy to them. He would further remind them that He had a definite object in view in selecting them; and it was that they go forth and labor in His vineyard, labor, namely, in the sanctification of His people. This address of our

Lord is as applicable to us priests in our day, as it was to the Apostles in theirs. For, are we not the successors of the Apostles, called to the same ministry, discharging the same functions as they, and sent to produce the same fruits of santification in the faithful of Jesus Christ?

What does this import to us, my Brethren? Does it not bring home to us our solemn responsibilities as priests and pastors of souls to labor assiduously and to the end of our lives in that particular portion of Christ's vineyard to which Church authority has assigned us: to strive by all means to santify the flock; nay, to expend ourselves and sacrifice our lives if need be, after the example of the Good Shepherd Himself in the interests of the flock committed to us? This consideration determines me to address you, venerable and dearly beloved Brethren in Jesus Christ, on the duties of priests and pastors of souls.

Now, among the duties whose fulfillment makes the good pastor, I remark four principal ones—zeal to announce the truths of salvation; vigilance in watching over the spiritual interests of his parishoners; vigor, to prevent irregularities; and assiduity in the direction of

souls, especially in the confessional, and in the training of the children of the parish.

2. The first duty of the good pastor consists in the zealous preaching of the divine Word. "I have appointed you, that you go forth and produce fruit—" and what is that fruit? It is, first of all, the knowledge of Christ's doctrine. "Go and teach," He says. It is by this means that His kingdom is to be propagated among men. For, as St. Paul says: "How can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? Or how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?"

This office of preaching is perhaps the most difficult, the most delicate, the most dangerous in the Church. If there were question of only giving forth from the pulpit some select discourses, some choice passages, studied phrases, a play upon words, it would need only that one be somewhat of a talker; it would suffice even to have a good memory. But there is question of speaking with knowledge and unction; there is question of instructing, moving, touching, converting; there is question of melting the ice of the most hardened hearts; of breaking

the hardest rocks; of forcing impiety even in its strongest and most inaccessible intrenchments; of going with the torch of the word of God to seek the most abandoned sinners in the most frightful shadows of death, where they repose in tranquillity. What talent is there not required? What life-long application? How many labors, studies, and watches? What power required in the discourses? What vehemence, what energy in words? What warmth of zeal? What purity of motive, so as to preach not one's self, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and to seek in all things His glory and the extension of His Kingdom among men?

II

1. It will need, then, shall we say, to be preachers of the first order: noted orators who cause themselves to be admired, as well by the justness of their expressions, as by the flowers of their eloquence?

Not so; the grace of the Saviour is not attached to a language which flatters the ear. The priest ought to be content with the talents God has given him; and it suffices that he leave nothing undone to cultivate the art of effective preaching according to all the means at his

disposal. But at the same time a priest called to the government of souls ought to put forth all his efforts to fulfill the ministry of preaching. To this effect he must study with perseverance, and never say, "I know enough." He must gather in the Holy Scriptures and in the works of the Fathers the celestial manna which is hidden there to nourish with it the people of God. He must saturate himself by meditation on those living and life-giving waters, to make them flow afterwards into the hearts of his hearers. He must, as a nursing mother, convert into milk the more solid nourishment, those admirable sentences, those sublime thoughts with which the sacred books are filled, to nourish with them the most tender children of the Church, and whose stomach is fitted only for light nourishment.

2. Such was the conduct of the Apostles and of so many holy pastors who brought forth the faithful by their enflamed teachings. The word of God was in their mouth, now as a two-edged sword which separated the son from the father; the daughter from the mother; the friend from his friend; which broke inclinations the strongest and the most natural, in order to sacrifice to the Lord of the universe a liberty of which He

was the Master; a sword, I say, which separated the miser from his riches; the voluptuous from the pleasures of the sense; and the most passionate men from the objects of their most ardent desires. It was now as a hammer which broke the chains of the most hopeless among the impious, and which gave them a charming and admirable liberty; now as a refreshing dew which caused to bud forth so many good designs, and ripened the precious fruits of a holy life; now as a voice resounding over the waters of the abyss, which arrested the fury of the storm; appeased the most violent tempests; and restored the calm of an amiable tranquillity; now as a lightning which blasted the cedars of Libanus, and shook the desert of Cades: that is to say, the most powerful enemies of religion. What, my Brethren, is the sacred Word more feeble now than it was in former times? Why then does it not bring about the same effects? Whence comes it that after having preached entire years, you scarcely see one conversion? Is it not because we weaken it by our worldliness and tepidity; like porous vessels which cause liquors to lose all their strength and render them useless? Let us animate ourselves, my friends, and labor

without ceasing to become apostolic men who announce with fruit the truths of salvation, and who practise ourselves what we preach to others. "Medice, cura teipsum."

SIXTH CONFERENCE

Duties of Pastors. (II)

I

1. The second duty of pastors is vigilance, and this vigilance must be the reflex of the vigilance of the Good Shepherd Himself. Now, what does our Lord say of His relations with His flock? He says, in St. John (x, 14): "I know Mine; and Mine know Me." And again: "The sheep hear the shepherd's voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out—and he goeth before them, and they follow him because they know his voice." This vigilance implies, in the first place, frequent visits of the pastor to the homes of his parishioners. How otherwise can he know them? And mark you, this knowledge is not in a mere social way, and is not come-by by spending long hours in their company; or by entering into their political or other schemes; or by giving ear to the small talk of the parish. A

pastor's visit need occupy only a few minutes. The people will recognize in it an act of zeal for their spiritual interests, and the people generally are not slow in recognizing the purpose of the visit of their pastor, and in appraising it. They instantly recognize the difference between the true pastor and the hireling—the spiritual man carrying out God's work, and the mere pleasure-seeker looking after his own material good.

In these visits among his flock he will soon learn how his parishioners stand in regard to their spiritual duties; whether they all go to Mass on Sundays; whether there are defaulters among them in regard to the reception of the Sacraments. He will learn whether the children are sent to the parish school, and what supervision is kept over them by their parents; whether they are taught to join nightly in the family prayers, and to avoid the occasions of sin.

It was said of the Good Shepherd, that "He went about doing good to all." And so also it ought to be of the faithful pastor. There is a blessing in the visits of the priest to the homes of his people; and for this, if for no other reason, that he participates in the priesthood of

Jesus Christ. The people feel honored by recognition on the part of their pastor. Their Catholicity is warmed within them, and they are made more docile to his instructions. Oh, how many a time does it happen that a short pastoral visit brings to Mass and to the Sacraments a poor soul who was a stranger to the House of God and who had not been to the Sacraments for years. The pastor will have reason to feel in the depths of his heart the consoling conviction expressed in the words of Jesus Christ: "I know Mine; and Mine know Me." And, "My sheep hear My voice and follow Me." On the contrary, there is no greater curse that could come upon a parish than the faithless hireling who holds himself aloof from his people and never visits them or knows their wants, contenting himself with long social visits with a select circle of special friends in whose company he squanders the precious hours that should be spent impartially among all the members of his flock. Such a pastor does not know his people as a pastor ought to know them, and does not bring forth the fruit expected of him by the Divine Master.

2. Among parishioners who have a special

claim on the frequent visits of their pastor are the poor, the sick, and the afflicted. These suffering members of Jesus Christ are in need of greater attention than the others. The strong, the robust, the well-to-do have a sufficient number of friends, and they need little consolation. But the ones in need, the afflicted; how few to visit and console them! "The poor are nobodies," says the great Roman orator; and this is what called forth the saying of the Psalmist: "Tibi derelictus est pauper." "O, Lord," he would say, "the rich have many followers, have abundance of consolers and flatterers; but the poor, they are thrown over on Thee"; on the charity of the Church, which alone has an interest in them.

II

And how well repaid the true pastor who has a warm and abiding interest in his people, by their prayers and by their cordial love and loyalty. It is expressed admirably in the beautiful lyric addressed by the humble parishioner to his devoted pastor: "Soggarth Aroon" (Beloved Priest).

"Who, in the winter's night,
Soggarth aroon;
When the cold blast did bite,
Soggarth aroon;
Came to my cabin door,
And on the earthen floor,
Knelt by me, sick and poor,
Soggarth aroon?

"Who, on the marriage day,
Soggarth aroon;
Made the poor cabin gay,
Soggarth aroon?
And did both laugh and sing,
Making our hearts to ring,
At the poor Christening,
Soggarth aroon?

"Who, as friend only met,
Soggarth aroon;
Never did flout me yet?
Soggarth aroon.
And when my heart was dim,
Gave, while his eye did brim,
What I should give to him,
Soggarth aroon?

"Och, you and only you,
Soggarth aroon.

And for this I was true to you,
Soggarth aroon.
In love they'll never shake,
When for old Ireland's sake,
We a true part shall take,
Soggarth aroon."

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Duties of Pastors. (III)

I

The third duty, or, shall I call it, series of duties of a pastor, is vigor.

This is shown especially in the constancy, order, and method he employs in the administration of his parish—constancy in the conduct of the functions of his pastorate—method so as to perform them with efficiency and completion—and order so as to avoid confusion. These qualities are desired; for otherwise the affairs of the parish will fall into hopeless disorder. The pastor must see to it that the parish records are kept with unfailing accuracy and neatness. Names, dates, and circumstances, will be entered on the spot, when the record of a particular function is desired; and never is he to trust to memory for future entrance, but, at least, a note is promptly to be jotted down, to be transferred on the earliest opportunity to

the permanent record. The same is to be done with regard to all parish receipts and expenses and monetary transactions of every kind. The Mass and other church services will take place unfailingly at the appointed hour, and will be gone through with accuracy of rubric; so as to edify and instruct those taking part in them. The church, the sacristy, the altar linen, the sacred vestments; everything about the church and its belongings will show forth a becoming reverence for God's house, and for the sacred functions that are carried on there, will show that the pastor, like the Psalmist, "loves the beauty of God's house, and the place where His Glory dwelleth."

He will also exercise vigilance over the doings in his parish, will see as far as he can that there be no festering sores in the way of immoral show and dance houses, and customs which occasion the missing of Mass on Sundays and holydays.

He will encourage the formation and organization of Catholic and religious societies; will promote the spread of Catholic reading, by having his church rack well stocked with good and edifying pamphlets and journals. And in this connection, I will relate a shrewd

remark I once heard from a venerable prelate in Ireland. It was in the course of an address given at a conference of his clergy, and it was to the effect that whenever he visited a church, he always took occasion to look at the book-rack, and he judged the pastor from what he observed there. If he saw it clean and well-stocked with Catholic literature, he judged that the pastor had the spiritual well-being of his people at heart. If, on the contrary, he saw either no book-rack at all, or one in which the booklets were soiled, and shabby, and in small quantity, he came away with the idea that somehow the pastor who had charge of that church failed in one of the most important duties of his pastorate, and that instead of feeding the flock committed to him with sound doctrine, he gave occasion for their souls' being poisoned with the false and corrupt literature of heretical writers.

II

The last duty of the pastor that I will touch on, and I will be brief, is assiduity in direction, which is chiefly exercised in the confessional and in the teaching of the Catechism.

Now, these are among the most arduous,

as they are at the same time among the most fruitful and consoling, of the labors of the pastor. There is surely nothing more wearisome than to be cooped up for long hours together in the confessional listening to the same sad tale of human frailty, told in every variety of detail, and every depth of sordidness and sin.

Here, too, the faithful pastor has need to keep his soul pure by the constant exercise of God's holy presence, and by prayer. For it is no easy task to be for hours in contact with sin, as confessors often are, and yet to preserve one's faculties clean and unsullied. And it is here that the priest has to say with the Psalmist: "Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit within my bowels."

But it is here also and especially that he discharges the office of the Good Samaritan, binding up the wounds of his people, and pouring upon them the oil and wine of grace and discipline after they have been waylaid and beaten by the infernal robber, and despoiled of their heavenly patrimony. To this office he must bring knowledge, and charity, and discretion, so as to act in the qualities of father, and judge, and teacher, and physician of his people, with

light to distinguish leprosy from leprosy, and to minister to each one the remedy of his disease.

From the confessional he will pass to the school-room and impart to the little ones a knowledge of Christian doctrine, and he himself will act the part of teacher and adviser.

To these duties are added others supplementary to or included in them. He is to be found, at one time, in the sanctuary, like another Moses, with his hands raised in prayer for his people, all occupied, as they will be, with external duties; at another, as the Josue of the hosts of God, leading them against the enemies of our Faith, and through means of the Word, spoken and written, defending the doctrines of the Church; at all times he is to be the champion of morality and piety, with sling and staff laying low now the lion and the wolf, personated in the local scandal-giver, and again, the Goliath of an impious world, ever the sworn enemy of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Clothed in the panoply of learning and prayer, he is to exhibit to mankind the power and holiness of the man of God, to be a faithful distributor of the graces of Redemption, a

zealous conductor of souls to the home prepared for them through the labors and sufferings and sacrifices of Jesus Christ, the Supreme Pastor.

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